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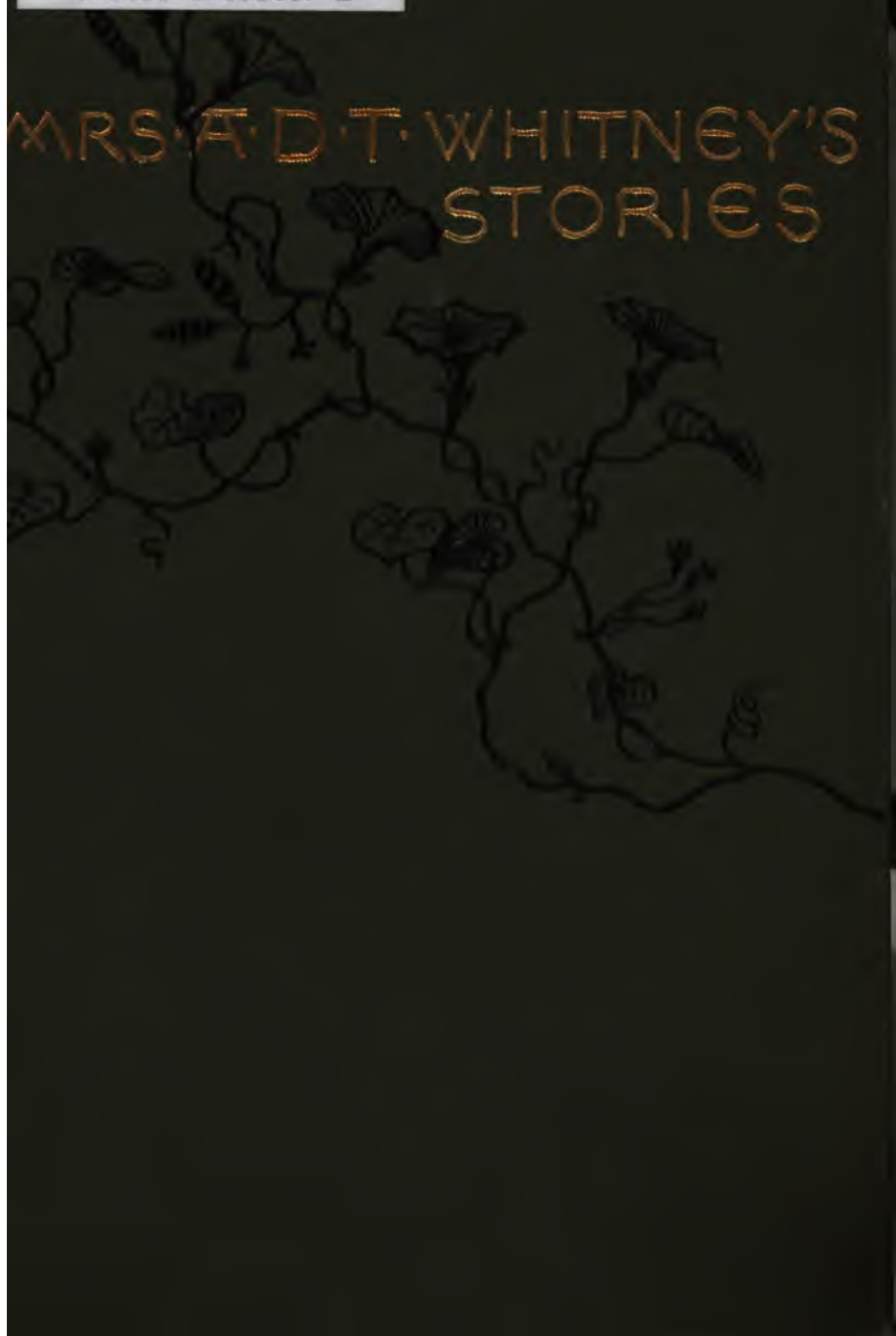
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HOMESPUN YARNS

BY

MRS. A. D. T. WHITNEY

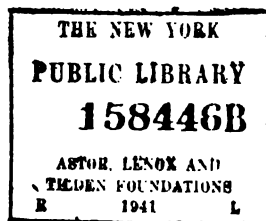
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HOMESPUN YARNS.

WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL.

I.

THE world has grown a great piece since I was a little girl, and I am not a hundred years old either. Jamie and I both have our grandchildren, to be sure ; but Jamie's are not big enough yet for anything but "this little pig and that little pig ;" and my own have only just begun to tease me for "stories about when you were a little girl ;" and so by way of posting up my memory, and lest when it begins to drop things it may let slip some of the dear old recollections that should be handed down in a family, I will try and rehearse a little, setting down a few fragments in black and white, where they can at least be "kept till called for." For I hold that happy recollections are the very best of heirlooms, and should at least be cherished by the generations equally with the teaspoons and the old china and the silver knee-buckles.

The city that I was born in has grown, since then, away out into the country ; and the country has grown away out over the wilderness and the mountains, till it stands thinking awhile what is to be done next on the shores of another ocean. It is a good thing that the world is round. What would have become of us all, and of our travels, if there *had* been a "jumping-off place" ?

When I was a little girl, born in a city, there were n't

half so many cities to be born in as there are now. Dozens of them have been born, since then, themselves.

There were no gas-lights in those nights, in the streets or in the houses. The lamplighters used to come round in the mornings, with their ladders and oil-cans, and trim and fill the lanterns; running up the rungs, and sliding down the posts. Then at evening they came again with their torches, and lit them up. It was great amusement for the city children to watch them from the windows; they had grown so quick, so elf-like, so shiny from head to foot with their employ. In the parlors we had astral lamps, giving the starlike light that their name signifies. Then there were mantel lamps, and hanging lamps in the chandeliers, which were like the children, sure to behave their worst if there was company.

We had n't any furnaces then; and I remember when there were no cooking-ranges, and very few coal-grates; and how the old gentlemen grumbled when the new inventions first came, and could n't eat their roast beef that was no longer cooked by a wood-blaze, or reconcile themselves at all to "sitting round a hole in the carpet."

Ways of living were different. There was n't half so much cloth wanted, nor half so much sewing or house-keeping to be done; and yet they all thought they were pretty busy, too. Very nice people were contented to have hair-cloth covered chairs and sofas, and plain white blinds to their windows, and they only put five widths into their silk dresses. There were pictures of women in hoops in the histories we studied at school; and we wondered at them, as we did at the costumes of the Turks and the Japanese.

When I was a very little girl, there were no omnibuses even. At least not in our city. Street-cars had never been dreamed of. There were no enormous distances to

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traverse, such as there are now. The street we lived in, which is to-day quite in the old part of the town, had but one house, then, below our own, which stood little more than half-way down. A great square of elegant dwellings opposite was then a vacant ground, where boys played ball and marbles, and flew kites, and built snow forts in winter. Brick by brick, we children, as we grew, saw all these stately mansions grow up likewise, only faster, as is the nature of things contrasted with souls.

When we went out of town, we drove in carriages or traveled in stages. The steam-whistle, that shrieks from end to end of the great metropolis to-day, had never lifted up its eldritch voice. The sweet country roads wound still and green out from the paved thoroughfares, crossed by no iron tracks, and bestridden by no warning sign-board bidding "Beware of the Engine!" It was something, then, to go out of town!

Country was country in those days, — not merely inconvenient city. Twenty miles was a journey. And when you got there you found a new atmosphere and look to things. City contrivances and fashions did n't appear simultaneously in the farm-houses. They had asparagus branches in the fire-places, and peacocks' feathers over the looking-glasses. You did n't find the same patterns of paper on the walls, or carpets on the floors. And there were n't any photograph-albums lying about, or novèls and magazines on the tables. Who had ever heard of a sun-picture then? You might see an ancient portrait or two in the best parlor, and you might find the Scottish Chiefs, or the Romance of the Forest, or The Spectator, or Paradise Lost, or Thomson's Seasons, if you looked for books. But these would n't be lying about; they would be safely put away on shelf or in cupboard, and you would have to look for them. Country was countrified;

it was n't brackish with a mixture of city airs; it was sweet and pure and simple and distinct, with ways of its own.

I am going to tell a story: that was what I began for. Children like particular memories better than general retrospections. It was to be a story, or, rather, a bit of that inexhaustible story from which old ladies draw, of "When I was a little girl."

It shall be a story of a summer journey.

There were two of us, my brother and I. We were sent to bed early, because we were to set off early in the morning. We put our shoes and clean stockings beside our beds, ready for the feet to pop into; the clothes were laid out for each of us on chairs. Fresh pantalets, with their triple ruffles; the fine flannel petticoat with its brier-stitched hem, and the dimity overskirt, edged with tiny points,—for my mother was dainty of her little ones' apparel; the frock of French print and the nankeen coat, braided with white,—these were for me. Jamie had his blue suit with the eagle buttons, and his new straw hat with dark blue ribbon to match.

Two queer things came, or seemed to come, close together. A restless toss upon my pillow, with a word to Jamie lying in the little open room adjoining, "Oh, dear, Jamie! this night never will be gone! I can't go to sleep, and it won't be morning till I do!" And then—our mother's bright, sweet look above me, and the sun making golden bars across the chamber through the blinds, and her call, "Wake up, little sleepers! We've got a journey to begin!" Just in a wink the night was gone, after all.

I suppose, if you could see a picture of our mother, she would look to you very like the queer mammas in the old editions of *Rosamond*, and *Harry and Lucy*. That is

one reason I like those old story-books so much to this day. But I know, from my childish memory, and because I have been told, that there was hardly a lovelier lady to be seen in those days than she, with her dark hair gathered up in knots and bows and bands about the delicately wrought high-topped tortoise-shell comb, and the soft little curls lying lightly upon her temples. I have a picture of her so, with a short-waisted dress, and a broad belt and gold buckle, and great sleeves that look odd, to be sure, but somehow stately, rounding out their airy swell from shoulder to elbow.

She had on her gray pongee traveling-habit when she came to wake us that morning, — a dress such as ladies wore in those days upon journeys; turned away in front from a white habit-shirt with little crimped ruffles, and the great sleeves coming in small and close at the wrists, finished with the same nice cambric crimpings. Her hair, except the little curls upon the temples, was wound smoothly around the comb in one great glossy band, which it was my delight always to see her brush when she dressed it, holding it with some difficulty in the grasp of one hand, while with the other she swept out its splendid length away down to her knees as she sat before her toilet-glass. Such hair as that is hardly to be seen now, except sewed to wires, so that anybody can buy it and tie it on.

We woke wide up in a minute, Jamie and I; and mother laughed to see us scramble on our stockings, heels before, in our hurry, asking questions, and chattering like newly wakened swallows.

“O mother, have you been to breakfast? Why did n’t you call us sooner?”

“Who cares for breakfast? Are the horses come?”

“O Jamie, how many stockings have you got on?”

"I'm most ready; but it always takes girls so long!"

"I'm glad my hair's just cut. Snarls are the worst things. There, Jamie, I'm most ready too. Oh, just think, it really *has* come, — to-day! And we're going to Ridgeley!"

"Not to-day. We shall ride all day to-day, and part of to-morrow. And I shall drive. That's the best of it. Are they gray horses or black ones? O mother, these eagle buttons are so new! they won't go through the holes! Please just come and fasten this."

And, after all, I was ready as soon as Jamie.

Table-rules had to be suspended that morning. Jamie was at the window half a dozen times with his biscuit in his hand, watching for the horses that were driven up at last, — a pale cream-colored and a gray one, — beauties, with long tails. Jamie went then and finished his biscuit sitting upon the front seat with the driver. I sat on the doorstep, looking alternately at him and at something on the opposite side of the street that had been a childish mystery and wonder to me ever since I could remember, and that I could hardly reason myself from my first thought of, though I knew better now. There was an old gate, seldom used, that led into a garden; and on this gate was a streak that had precisely the effect of a black cat's tail shut in. How many weary minutes I had watched it from the nursery window above, wondering if I should ever see the gate opened, and find out if there were really a black cat there or not! To this day I never have. The illusion was always complete. There was the tail, curved up from the crack as if in pain, and the cat must be on the other side of it. I could not help looking at it and thinking of it so, even after my mother had led me over and shown me that it was only a dash of black paint.

When my father and mother had finished their break-

fast, and mother had put on the Leghorn bonnet with its high crown that went over the great comb, and its wide brim that shaded her face and held, away back against the soft curls, gauze bows and flowers, I helped Martha bring out the bags and shawls. I had also my doll and three picture-books. There were pockets to the carriage, and a great box under the driver's seat. It was great fun to pack these,—to put in first the little parcels that would not be wanted till night, and then the books and the cakes and the paper of sugar-plums which were to be wanted first, and were to console the tediousness of the journey when the hours began to grow long in the heat of the day.

There was an excellent place for Dolly; a seat by herself, formed by the steps of the carriage on the farther side, where they were folded up within the door. You don't see carriages made so now. They are hung low, and there is just one iron step that is never folded in; but in those days, when Jamie and I went to Ridgeley in the summers, it was a great part of the ceremony and delight,—the letting down of the steps with a rattle, the ascending them to the high body of the vehicle, and the shutting them up with a slam by the driver after we were in.

So at last the trunks were strapped behind, and we were off, in the fresh, sparkling summer morning. The man from the stable gave up the long white reins to my father when he was seated, touched his hat, and walked away down the sidewalk, putting one hand in his pocket, as he had doubtless had pleasant occasion given him to do; the little children playing in the sand where the new house was building down the street looked up as we went by, and I was very sorry for them that they were to have no better time to-day, when Jamie and I were going off on a journey; the wheels clattered merrily over the round

paving-stones till we got upon the "soft street," as we children called it, where the new macadamizing had been done; and presently we drove over a long bridge with a wide blue river running below, and came really and truly out into the beginning of the country.

"Now, father, let me drive," said Jamie.

"By and by," said father.

"It's nice and level here," said Jamie, with as strong suggestion of argument as he was apt to venture upon. He did not say "Why not now, father?" as some boys would,—not by any means naughty boys either. He knew that when father said "by and by," he meant by and by, and that the "why not now?" of persistence was never tolerated.

"Yes, it's nice and level," replied my father, who was, on his part, never unnecessarily short or peremptory in his denials; "but I have two very good reasons for not letting you drive just yet. I wonder if you can guess what they are."

"Perhaps there's a hill coming."

"We might be coming to a hill, possibly; I don't think the hills will put themselves at all out of their way to meet us; that *would* be something frightful, and require a man at the reins! No, that is n't it."

"Perhaps you think we'll meet a drove of sheep."

"If we did, I could relieve your responsibility. No, that is n't it, either."

"Well, father," said Jamie, looking with his bright blue eyes all around and forward upon the unobstructed way, "I don't think I see any *great* reason at all."

Father laughed.

"You discriminate wisely between 'I don't think I see' and 'I don't think there is.' Well, I'll tell you. In the first place, the horses are fresh."

"Fresh?"

"Yes; not at all tired, and inclined to go pretty fast."

"I guess I could hold them," said Jamie, straightening up his little person, and looking very mighty indeed with squared elbows and closed fists that made little back and forth movements as if grasping the tugging reins. "But what is the other reason?"

"You are fresh, too," said father.

Jamie looked a little uncomprehending.

"You have just begun your day, and the pleasure of it. You have n't used any of it up. By and by you will begin to get a little tired of sitting still and merely looking about. It will be a good plan, then, to have the pleasure of the driving in reserve. The best for the last, Jamie, — like the mince-pie."

"Only I did n't get that, after all," said Jamie. "It's a bad plan to save up too long."

"If I did n't understand better than Miss Eunice," said father, laughing.

Miss Eunice was an elderly lady friend, to whose house our mother had taken Jamie and me some time before. There were two kinds of pie at dinner, and we had given us a small piece of each. Jamie had carefully set aside his mince-pie on his plate, and eaten all the apple-pie first, on the principle of keeping the best until the last; when, to his great consternation, before he could touch his knife to his favorite morsel, Miss Eunice interposed.

"You don't like the mince-pie, do you, dear? Well, here's another bit of apple." And in a twinkling the substitution was made, and the mince-pie laid back upon its own dish. Jamie did n't cry, though he came pretty near it for a second; but he told me privately, afterwards, that Miss Eunice was a "gump," and I think the lady never regained her former place in his estimation.

Poor Jamie! I don't remember that ever in his life he lost anything again by saving it up too long!

"There's a cow in the road, father!" cried Jamie, suddenly, a minute after; "and she looks cross, or something. What is the matter with her?"

Mother and I looked out, then, at the front, between father's elbow and Jamie's shoulder, and saw, directly before us, at some rods' distance, a white cow, in apparently a very agitated state of mind, moving to and fro with uncertain air, and a sort of plunge in her quickened gait; giving an excited toss of her head every now and then, accompanied by a short and anxious "moo."

"She's crazy, I guess," said Jamie.

"She's in some trouble," said my father. "Strayed away from her pasture, probably, and lost herself."

"Is it quite safe to pass her?" asked my mother, anxiously. She was a little timid in a carriage. "Won't she frighten the horses?"

"Or hook them?" asked I, who had a special terror of horned beasts.

"Oh no," answered father, quite calmly. "There'll be no danger. She'll move aside as we come up. She's only astray, as I said," he added, as we approached her nearer. "I can see the rope about her neck. She has been tied, and broken away."

We could all see it now, hanging from her neck and swaying about, dragging one end in the dust as she moved.

She was heading toward the right-hand side of the road as we came up, and father took the left.

Suddenly a queer thing happened, that really threw us into danger.

As we approached the cow, and were about to pass, she hastened her steps across the road, at the same time turning down toward us on our right. With this movement,

her rope, that had been dragging on the ground, lifted, and showed itself attached to a heavy chain, which in its turn reached up the steep bank on our left, and was fastened to a post in the rail fence. A gap in this fence, close by, and furrows in the bank, made it evident, at a glance, how she had got into her present position, and what was her trouble, and ours as well.

It was a peril, though a strange and ludicrous one, for an instant. Blundering Mooly all but had us in a frightful noose. The horses would have been entangled and thrown down, and the cow, perhaps, tumbled into the carriage, with three more forward steps of either. My father turned short round to the right, striking with his whip, at the same instant, toward Mooly, to check her advance. The carriage gave a whirl and a tilt,—for the forward wheels were not made to run under; the cow tossed her horns under the very noses of the horses, and fell back; the horses sprang past her and dashed on, my father drawing the reins tightly; and for another two or three rods it was a question of a run. But they were curb-bitted, and the hands upon them were steady; and in a minute more the danger was over, and we caught our breaths.

Mother was very pale, leaning back in her corner of the carriage. As soon as father could transfer the reins to one hand again, he leaned back anxiously toward her.

“Are you faint, Susie?”

“Oh no,” answered my mother with a smile, the color coming back a little to her cheeks; “but it was a great fright.”

“It has proved our horses. They were less startled than most animals would have been, and I have them perfectly under control.”

Father always found something to say which was just

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the assurance mother needed. He never told her not to be afraid ; he always gave her a reason why she should feel that fear was uncalled for. She smiled again, in reply ; and, though she did not say much for some minutes, the color kept creeping back to her face, and the expression of anxiety relaxed, and I could see that her first day's pleasure was not going to be spoiled by the accident.

II.

We went on, through two or three suburban towns ; through reaches of wood where the road lay between the villages ; along the edges of lonely swamps, sometimes, where we heard the cry of strange birds, or the croak of great frogs, sitting half in, half out of the water, on mossy stones or stumps, and could see the tall, stately cat-o'-nine-tails standing in still ranks, with their close-fitting brown velvet uniform jackets, always prim and orderly, and drawn up in the same array, as if they had stood there from year to year, though no one might pass by for days or weeks together to see. I always had peculiar fancies about these plants. They were not flowers, — they had no leaves, — they were different from any other growing thing. I always saw them on these summer journeys, and never at any other time. They seemed to wait, like elfin sentinels, by the wayside, or to stand spell-bound, like enchanted things, in motionless groups, away back among green shadows.

Then there were roadside brooks that we drove through to wet the wheels and cool the horses' feet, and sometimes to let down their heads for a long, delicious drink. We had our mugs, too, in the carriage-pockets, and it was great pleasure to get out and dip up from among the shining pebbles the cool running water that came away down

from the far hills, bringing with it the sweet flavor of the rocks and moss, and the purity that only open streams, trickling along in the fresh air, under sunshine and forest shadow, can ever have.

Then I unpacked some nice parcel, and handed round to father and mother and Jamie the cakes that tasted so good after our ride of hours since the early and half-eaten breakfast. And then we began to "take sides and guess houses," — a travelers' game invented by ourselves, that whiled away a good piece of the long stretch of time and way between morning and noon.

We made our guesses as we wound along a wild and solitary piece of road where no house was visible; yet that being a road, we knew must lead, at last, among habitations.

"I guess red," would be the first cry, from Jamie or me, eager to claim the color that in these regions gave the broadest chance.

"Well, I guess yellow," would be the reply, taking the alternative. "What do you guess, mother?"

"Oh, I don't know, — black, perhaps." Black stood with us for the weather-beaten tint of the many buildings that had never known the touch of paint at all.

And once in a while father would say, decidedly, "I guess white."

Then there would be great haste between us to take his side, which we had good reason to suspect the strongest; and presently, out of the four nominated colors, we settled down to two parties only, each standing by its own, — the canvass greatly affected by the apparent comparative reliance of individuals upon their separate conjectures, which varied according as they rested more on memory or chance.

Then what an eager watching for the first glimpse, at a

turn in the road, of some distant farm-house, or the showing of its chimney among the trees! And what glee and triumph for two of us, if a color we had chosen turned out to be the right! Sometimes, of course, we were all wrong; but this only proved that father and mother did not *always* know of a surety what should come next, and gave fresh zest of uncertainty to future ventures.

We had drawn upon each of these resources successively, and we had been four hours upon the road, when Jamie said, "I think, father, it's all used up, now, but the driving." And father, smiling, gave the reins into his hands.

We were upon a long, even reach of turnpike road, that lay between fields of grass and corn. It was a pretty thing to see Jamie, in his bright new suit and eagle buttons, sitting so upright and firm and manly, with the broad reins in his little hands, and such a look of glad daring in his handsome face, as his blue eyes looked straight forward, with a glow of light in them, at the great free-stepping horses, and the wind blew back the brown curls and waves of his hair and the blue ribbon of his hat. It was my pleasure to watch him then; I never thought that my resources were used up. Besides, if he had the driving, I had always Dolly; and this was a pleasure boys knew nothing about.

"Shall we have dinner at Nishaway?" asked Jamie, as father resumed the reins at the brow of a long hill, at last.

"Yes, at Nutt's tavern," said father, with an anticipation of good cheer in his tone. Jamie just opened and shut his lips in a satisfied way. Nutt's tavern was an enjoyment of itself.

There were no great, clattering hotels then, with fusty, pinchbeck style and vulgar hurry; we stopped at quiet,

roomy country inns, with broad, clean, homely porticoes, and smooth slopes of turf rolling away from these to the roadside over which we came up to the door, under the swinging sign-board.

Nutt's tavern was a fair and pleasant specimen of such. We arrived there to-day, as usual, at a little past noon; and the easy rumble of our city equipage brought "Cap'n Nutt" himself to the entrance, to make us welcome.

"Ben thinkin' 't was time to expect you, Squire, for a week back." All along the road, every year, people expected the "Squire," from the Fourth of July "out," as our Irish brethren say.

There was a great cackling in the farm-yard, for the hens were proclaiming their own "well done" for the day, and the bountiful sweetness of the hay smell came from the great barn that stretched out at right angles from the tavern at a few paces' distance. A couple of hostlers had loosened our horses' traces, and looped up the harnesses, while we were alighting and looking round; and in two minutes Jamie was running on before father to the barn to see them cared for, and mother and I had gone into the little low-ceiled, shaded best parlor, where the bright brasses and asparagus in the wide brick fireplace and the striped rag-carpet on the floor looked just as they had done last year, and every year since I could remember Nutt's.

Here mother laid aside her high bonnet, and rolled her curls smoothly over her fingers by the little tilted glass against the wall that had a gay lady on a green bank painted at the top, and a gilt eagle with two chains of bright balls festooning from his beak to the corners of the frame above. My bonnet and coat were quickly off also; and then we walked out together along the wide hall that

opened through the house, and led upon a great, square, sloping platform at the back. Here we found Mrs. Nutt, round and jolly and tidy, and smiling at us with that especially benignant smile of an old lady innocent of teeth, and gone back, so, to a certain infantile simplicity and sweetness of expression.

It would be difficult to describe our country dinner; impossible to convey an idea of our relish for it. There were the eggs the hens had just been cackling about; there was broiled chicken, deliciously tender, and hearty beefsteak, the least bit tough. There was apple-pie and mince-pie and custard-pie, and cheese, and cider, and plum-cake, and smoking tea, and yellow cream, and brown bread as good as cake, and butter that looked like gold and smelt like a nosegay; and there was a great plate — without which a country-tavern table is never set — of doughnuts. And we ate what we liked best, and all we wanted; for all was light and sweet and fresh, and daintily cooked by Mrs. Nutt's own hands; and we were traveling, and nothing ever hurt us on a journey.

After dinner, mother went up-stairs, and had a little nap: and Jamie and I went all over the yards and barns, and made acquaintance with a dog that would roll over and beg and speak, and with a great, beautiful brood of yellow ducks which had an old hen for a step-mother; and we drove the peacock round, and tried to make him spread his tail, which no peacock that I ever saw would ever do for me until I was old enough to have outgrown my eagerness for its fabulous glories. And Captain Nutt tried to hunt up his famous rooster, of a new breed, that he said had been out of sight for some days, and show him to father; and when Moses, the hostler, finally went down a trap-door under the barn, and routed him out with a great scurry, we had such a laugh as never was! It was a

good while before he would come at all; and then such a poor, pitiful, sneaking creature, with his comb hanging, and his tail-feathers draggled and broken and half pulled out, and his skin picked bare in spots, as showed himself under protest, and made an instant rush across the corner of the yard, and hid himself under a pile of boards, you would n't believe!

"He's sheddin' his feathers," said Captain Nutt, almost as much mortified in his turn. "I did n't know he'd got to look so bad. The hens must have been a-peckin' of him too; and I guess that air rampageous old red rooster of Danforth's has ben over, an' hed a fight. But it's a famous breed, for all that."

"A bran-new breed, squire," said Moses to my father, with a twinkle of fun. "All meat and no feathers."

Captain Nutt and father had a hearty laugh then, and went off together to look at the oxen.

We could have stayed at Nutt's tavern a whole week happily, but in a couple of hours from our arrival the horses were put to again and driven round; and mother and I had on our bonnets, and Jamie was on the front seat, and we all got in, and Mrs. Nutt smiled, and the Captain bowed, and Moses went off with a pleased face and his hand in his pocket, and we rolled away again over the turf and into the high-road, as Jamie said, to "renew our journey."

This feeling of freshness and renewal, and of more pleasantness farther on, is the great charm of a journey, as it is of our life.

It had been nice to get out of the carriage, and rest ourselves, and run about, and eat a good dinner; it was nicer yet to set off anew, with the great green hills rising up before us, among which lay our road; the horses feeling, like ourselves, quite ready and glad to go on,—with

other villages and people to see, other brooks to water at, and a tea-table as bountiful in its way as the dinner to be ready for us when we were hungry again, somewhere, we did not know yet where; perhaps at the tavern in Anniton, perhaps, as last year, at the "House Beautiful."

"May n't we stop at the House Beautiful?" I begged, when we had traveled three hours more, and the sun began to slide down the west.

Now at the House Beautiful we had found ourselves accidentally the year before, when we had been delayed by the casting of a horse's shoe, and it had grown too late to reach Anniton by tea-time. It had opened its doors to us while we waited, and we had been made welcome, and had stayed all night, and had seen wonderful things, and I had given a name out of my dear Pilgrim's Progress to the house of our entertainment.

Two maiden ladies lived there; their grandfather had kept it as a tavern before Anniton became the stage stopping-place. It was a great rambling mansion, with a pole before the door, from which the sign had long been taken down; and on this, now, a beautiful wren-house perched itself instead, and woodbine climbed up, and hung long wreaths and streamers about it to the very top.

"Suppose we do stop at the House Beautiful," said my mother, "and then keep on to Anniton to spend the night?"

"Oh, do, father! I want to see if Adam and Eve have fell down yet."

"Or the apples."

"Or a bird; or only just a few of the little red berries."

All this we said in one breath.

"I think that great accident happened, once for all, a good many thousand years ago," said my father. "But you should say 'fallen,' not 'fell.'"

"Well, fallen. Oh, I do hope they have!"

"I'm afraid that's a little touch of the old coveting serpent," said mother.

We were conscious of no harm, Jamie and I; and I don't think mother meant that we were very wicked, after all.

"Miss Perie was real good,—was n't she?" said Jamie.

"And Miss Persie too," quoth I.

"It'll be prime to go there again!" That is what boys said, then, to express completeness of pleasure. Now it would be "jolly" or "bully." There are fashions of slang, as of everything else.

"You'll stop,—won't you, father?"

"Perhaps we will," said my father; and this decision led to a bit of an adventure, to close this day, which had begun, also, with something very near one. This is just why I have chosen this special day to tell you about.

It was half-past five when we drove up in front of "Radd's." It was so the country people spoke, to this day, of what had been, long ago, Radd's Tavern.

The ladies Radd, Miss Experience and Miss Perseverance, came to the door. Miss Perie was altogether the "old lady" in her style; wearing a cap and a false front of little curls, with a band of black velvet ambushed among them, hiding its edge, and holding it on. Miss Persie, some years younger, kept to her own natural front of grayish locks, *frisée*, and wore a great many bows and notched ends of brown satin ribbon about her comb, where my mother had the bows and bands of her beautiful hair. But they had placid and lovely faces, both of them; and there was genial, honest gladness of welcome in them now, as they met us at the steps of the carriage, and hastened us in.

"Now, this is real clever of you," said Miss Perie. "I

should have took it hard if you had drove by without stopping."

"They would n't have thought of doing that, Sister Perie," said Miss Persie, reproachful of the admission of possibility. She had me by the hand, leading me down the long hall to the sitting-room ; and with the words she suddenly picked me up by the arms, and kissed me.

"We wanted to see Adam and Eve," said I without a bit of concealing tact.

"Has n't it tumbled down yet?" cried Jamie, eagerly.

"No," said Miss Persie, laughing ; "but when it *does*" —

"I'm to have Adam and the horse," said Jamie.

"And I'm to have Eve and the barberry-bush," said I.

They took us into the sitting-room, which was oak-paneled, and had an old-fashioned square carpet with a border on the floor, of which it covered only the middle, and the dark oak boards shining beyond it like a rich framework. And the wonderful fireplace was there, set with painted tiles ; wide and open, to hold a generous blaze in winter, but decked now with a summer garniture such as I never beheld elsewhere. In the first place, upon the deep brick hearth had been placed garden earth, heaped and moulded into undulations of mound and hollow, — I might say, almost hill and dale ; on this again, a covering of bright green moss, carefully fitted and kept fresh with water ; bits of pine branch and little trails of winterberry vine diversifying it ; and a china shepherdess with her dog, and a numerous flock of milk-white sheep, grouped about among it all.

We sat right down before it, Jamie and I, and would have found enough in it to amuse us for hours, if presently the thought of Adam and Eve had not recurred. Miss Perie said she would take us up to see it while Miss

Persie should lay the table and put the kettle on for tea. *Their* tea, good souls, had been over and cleared away by five.

Then we went, well pleased, up the broad staircase of shallow steps, and trotted after Miss Perie along the gallery above. At the far end she opened a door into a kind of state-chamber, and went in to roll up the paper shades, and set open a blind, while Jamie and I stood just within the entrance, trying to accustom our eyes to the dimness of the shut-up room. Then suddenly it shone upon us, as the light was let in. Over the mantel, in a great frame or case, projecting six or seven inches and glassed in front, and occupying the whole width and half the height of the chimney, — the glory of the old mansion, — Adam and Eve in wax-work, done by Miss Perie and Miss Persie at a boarding-school forty years before.

In truth, it was a marvel. The whole right of the scene was occupied by forest trees and interlacing vines, made of wax foliage, fashioned bit by bit, and stuck in according to the taste of the artists. Among these, astonishing birds in rare companionships, a robin-redbreast and a poll-parrot on the same branch; yellow-birds and bluebirds and gorgeous nondescripts; fruits also, as curiously grouped; crimson apples and pink peaches, purple grapes and golden oranges. Then below, and scattered throughout the whole, the animals: sheep in abundance; cows; goats, — much like the sheep, with the addition of horns; hens and chickens; a cat, a dog, a lion, and a leopard; and a green snake lying in the grass. Close by Adam, a red-brown horse, with enormous tail and mane. But above all, there were Adam and Eve! Two little wax figures like dolls! Eve's light, flossy hair — of silk, or real, I don't know which — hanging in waves about her, nearly enveloping her; her face turned toward us

and away from Adam, who stood beyond, slightly turned away also ; perhaps there had been already a little paradisiacal tiff. At Eve's feet, the barberry-bush with its glowing pendules of scarlet berries ; this was what I coveted.

We stood in breathless delight and awe before it ; it was minutes before we spoke. Then Jamie said, timidly, " I wonder if it ever *will* tumble down ! "

" Perhaps if we were to jump " — whispered I.

" That would n't be fair ! " said the boy, with a proud, indignant honor in his tone. I shrank back abashed.

We looked, and looked, and drew long breaths of relief now and then ; and pretty soon Miss Perie said, " Now we will go and see the peacock. "

So she led us, down three steps, into a narrow passage diverging from the first, and along this till we came to a tiny door in an angle of the wall, — a bit of a door just wide enough to pass through, and so low that Miss Perie had to stoop. This led upon a flight of ten narrow steps, which brought us up into a little railed balcony with a recessed alcove at the back, and looking down in front into a long, empty hall, — the ball-room of the old inn. This that we were in was the musicians' gallery. Back in the alcove stood what we came to see, — a magnificent stuffed peacock, with very full and perfect tail at its utmost spread. No live bird ever did as much for me, as I said before ; and I doubt if any live bird ever had such a tail to spread, which accounts for it.

It was like a dream or a fairy story, — this queer old house with its curious things, and its many rooms, its steps up and steps down, and unexpected doors, and little galleries and "cubbies." We believed that there were scores of wonders within its walls yet unrevealed. But we were satisfied with Adam and Eve and the peacock. Then we went down and had a race in the great, empty

ball-room. Something of the old merriment that had clung to its walls when grandmothers were young, touched and inspired us, and we frolicked up and down in pure glee of space and freedom, till we heard the tinkle of a bell at the foot of the great stairs.

"That's tea," said Miss Perie; and we went down.

It was tea, and a great many things beside. Brown bread and white bread, and butter, raspberries and cream, plum-cake, and gingerbread, and *doughnuts*.

It was after seven when we had finished, and were bidding Miss Perie and Miss Persie good-by. We had eight miles to go to Anneton; and in the west, where we had trusted to the long twilight and the young moon, there was a dark cloud that rolled itself into great, billowy edges, and kept swelling up the sky. We had had candles in the sitting-room, which was shaded by thick lilac bushes close to the windows, and we had not guessed at this.

"Oh James!" cried my mother, "look there!"

"You'd better stay all night," said Miss Perie.

"Oh no, we're obliged to you," said my father. "It will go round, quite likely. We had better keep on."

Mother looked at him again, and hesitated before she put her foot on the carriage-step. She never said so before us, but we knew quite well that she was afraid of thunder.

"It is only a wind-cloud, I think," said father.

"You will stop if it comes on to — storm?" she said, still hesitating.

"Oh yes, we'll get under cover somewhere. It won't amount to much."

And so we started. But before we crossed the Moonick bridge, and came into the woods that lay beyond, a little quivering thread of lightning ran down the black curtain

of cloud, a few drops fell from its upper fringe, and our adventure began. There was a mile of woods before we should come out into the open road, and as much more distance to the nearest dwellings. The wind freshened, and the black cloud surged up higher — faster. Father urged on his horses, and mother leaned back in her corner, and never spoke a word. In the heart of the wood we were in complete darkness. Father gave the horses their heads, and they kept the road. I could hear mother's quick breath, and feel a tremble of her hand as she held mine. Suddenly, on before us, straight down across the opening between the trees, shot a bolt of pale, intense purple fire : and crashing, rolling, splitting, hissing, all in one mingled sound, came the thunder-burst. The horses paused, half-reared, and then sprang on ; but my father held them firmly by the curb, and they quieted again, — quieted to a safe but very rapid trot, which in a few hushed, fearful minutes brought us out into comparative light. Then the rain came down in great drops. Father drew up the boot, which he had unbuckled when the first sprinkle fell. Mother wrapped a shawl around me, and did not let me go when she had done it, but held me tight in her arms.

“ Jamie had better come back here,” she said, speaking for the first time, with something very strange in her voice. Father knew what it meant.

“ There 's a little farm-house along here somewhere, in the edge of Rundell ; we can reach it in a few minutes, and perhaps they 'll take us in,” he said.

Jamie climbed in over the back of the front seat, and we sat huddled together, — all three. There came no more such terrific bursts, but the lightning flashed in broad sheets at quickening intervals, and the thunder rolled in almost continuous accompaniment. We could see our road quite plainly now.

"Jacobs told me the truth in recommending these horses," said my father, in a cheery way, drawing the boot-leather higher toward his shoulders. "They will stand almost anything."

And then we said nothing more, but watched with dazzled eyes the flashes, and heard the rain-streams pour like shot upon the carriage-roof. Ten minutes of this glare and dash and silence brought us to a little long, low, red house on a grass slope by the roadside. Father turned the horses right up to the door, and gave one stroke with his whip-handle upon it. A woman opened it, — her husband and three children following her, and looking from behind to see who came.

"Can you" — began my father.

"Land's sake, yes!" cried the woman. "Come right along in. Jeb, open the kerridge door, and then help round with the hosses to the barn. Enoch, fetch the lantern!"

The oldest boy went to obey; and the farmer opened the door and let down the steps. I jumped right into his arms. Then came mother, very pale, and quite exhausted. As for Jamie, he had scrambled over the front seat again, to come out from his proper place like a man.

We had never been in a house like this before. It was a contrast to the House Beautiful, yet it had its charms. Jamie said it was prime fun. They wanted to set a tea-table for us, but we assured them we had had our tea an hour before, and could not eat. But the farmer would bring up a pitcher of strong cider, and his wife produced a plate of the inevitable doughnuts. Just to gratify them, we tasted; and then we children begged to be put to bed, partly from real weariness, partly because we were impatient for the fun of it.

"Anything will do; a shake-down in the same room with us," said father.

"Oh, there's plenty of room," replied the hostess, in the pride of her hospitality. "The little folks can have the eave-garrets, and our boys can go into the shed-chamber. Ruthie can come down and sleep in the cot."

Mother let her arrange it in her own way; and presently, to our great delight, we were ushered up a broad, bare stairway of clean unpainted boards, into the middle space under the house-roof. On each side were the "eave-garrets," — two nice little tidy bedrooms made up fresh for us with coarse, but very white, sheets and *pillow-beers*, as the good woman called them.

There was a savory smell of thyme and lavender and pennyroyal and all sorts of herbs, drying in the open room, mingled with the odor of the clean rough boards and rafters also, that had baked under the summer suns for years and years.

Mother tucked us in, and heard us say our prayers; and then went down to her own room, which was only just at the foot of the broad, short stairway. She left her door open, and we all seemed close together. Jamie and I talked across for a long time about what there might be in the open garret that lay between us, and how far it went, and where it led to. We made up quite a story about it, in the middle of which, at last, we fell asleep.

Well — that was our adventure. We thought it quite a considerable one. The morning sun came up grand and glorious, and shone into the great garret in little slender lines of light, here and there, between the boards and rafters. And it was very still, after the rain-music to which we had slept and dreamed. We wondered if father and mother and the horses were up. Very soon we were down-stairs, looking out at the open door upon the green

slope, where every blade was strung with shining drops. There were ducks and chickens about, and the horses were being curried at the barn-door. There was a breakfast of hot cakes, and maple syrup, and fried pork and eggs, and potatoes, and *doughnuts*; and by seven o'clock, after many thanks and "welcomes," we were on our way. At twelve, coming to the top of a hill, just at the end of our journey, we spied grandpa's old chaise turning into the green lane at the bottom; and as he got out at the barn, our horses trotted up to the door. So we got safely, at last, to Ridgeley. But the time we had at Ridgeley would be a story of itself.

It occurs to me just to mention this before I finish. Years afterward, when we were man and woman, and Jamie and his wife and little child, and I and my husband and our little David and Dolly, were all at the old home in V—— Street to spend Christmas, and I was toasting Baby Susie's feet before the fire, and telling her "this little pig and that little pig," there came a great ring at the door, such as express-men and telegraph-boys and people after the doctor only give, and presently word was brought up to us of something that had come "in a big box." I rolled all the little pigs up in Susie's crimson flannel nightgown, and popped her into nurse's lap, and Jamie and Mrs. Jamie and I ran down to see.

A great case of boards had come by railroad, with this curious address:—

"TO THE CHILDREN OF JAMES THORNELL, ESQ.,

"V—— STREET,

"B——."

Inside the lid was a letter, explaining. It was a bequest to Jamie and me. Miss Perie and Miss Persie were dead, and this was Adam and Eve.

MY MOTHER PUT IT ON.

It was old Boston — Boston fifty years or so ago — and it was New Year's morning.

Since June we had lived in our new house in one of the lately laid-out, airy neighborhoods over on the West Hill. Before that, we lived in Pearl street, where all the great warehouses are now, and where the other great warehouses were burned down,—melted into strange, stone monuments of ruin,—in the terrible fire, a dozen years ago. Down in Pearl street, in a large house with a garden to it, and a wonderful staircase inside that had landings with balustraded arches through to other landings, and which was a sublimity and delight to me that the splendid stairways in Roman palaces can scarcely equal now,—still lived my best and beautiful friend, Elizabeth Hunter. I thought in those days all Elizabeths were beautiful, because I knew two who had fair, delicious complexions, sweet, deep-cornered mouths, and brown hair. My hair was light and straight and fine; it looked thin and cold to me by the side of theirs.

On this New Year, I was to go and spend the day with Elizabeth. My father and my brother Andrew were to come to dinner. My mother was an invalid, and could not bear the cold and the fatigue. But she had my pretty dress all ready for me, a soft, blue merino — real deep-sky blue,—with trimming to the tucks and hem and low neck-band and sleeve-bindings of dark carbuncle-colored velvet ribbon in a raised Greek pattern. You may think

it looked queer; but it didn't; it was very pretty and becoming.

Before I was to go, however, there was ever so much other New Year delight to keep the time from seeming long. Father and Andrew were going down to the whip-factory in Dock square, to choose for Andrew the longest-lashed toy whip, with the gayest snapper and the handsomest handle, that he could pick out there. And afterward they were going to a great toy-shop, to buy me the wax doll I had been promised.

I did not care to choose my doll, as Andrew would choose his whip. I had a kind of real little-mother feeling about that. I would rather have what came to me; what my father brought me. I wanted it to be mine from the first minute I saw it, without any doubt, or any chance to choose otherwise. If I had looked and hesitated among dozens of them, and picked out one, I should always have felt as if I had left some child behind that maybe ought to have been mine, and that I had not quite *whole* chosen any one. So I was content to stay with my mother, and run down from her with the quarter and half dollars to the watchman and the carrier and the scavenger and the milkman, when they came with their expectation of a little present. What dear old simple days those were, when we had a family regard for our milkman, our watchman, our scavenger!

Meanwhile, I was to be dressed.

I had just got on my blue morocco slippers, that looked so funny with my striped dark calico morning-frock, when the bell, that I thought I had done answering with the silver fees, rang loudly again. Marcella, our housemaid, called me from the foot of the nursery stairs.

"It's somebody for you, Miss Emmeline," she said, and I thought she meant another man for money. I took the

last quarter from the little wallet father had filled for me, and ran down. But it was the tall black servant from the Hunters'. And he had in his hand a pretty paper box tied with a silk cord.

"Mrs. Hunter's compliments and love, miss, to you and to your ma; and she hopes you'll wear something she has made for you just like Miss Elizabeth's to-day."

I took the box, made a little courtesy to him, and said, "Please thank Mrs. Hunter, and say I wish her a happy New Year, and here's a happy New Year for you." For I thought he could n't help seeing the silver quarter, and thinking it was for him; and father had told me to "use my judgment," and I certainly wanted to give it to him the minute I saw he had come all the way with a present for me. Elizabeth and I liked Jefferson very much; he gave us macaroons and prunes and almonds from the pantry, and he swung us in the swing in the great drying-room. He made me a fine bow, and thanked me, and said he should keep my quarter for luck.

So I ran up to my mother and kissed her,—for somehow whenever anything pleasant came to me I always kissed my mother,—and we opened the box. It was a beautiful blue silk braid net, with a long blue ribbon run through to tie it round the head with.

"Oh mother!" I cried, "it's a *long* ribbon, for flying ends!" I was so glad; for I had no curls like Elizabeth's, and I thought flying ribbons would seem like them a little, and I had never worn any.

"It is very pretty," said my mother; "but I think, dear, with your short hair, a short bow would look better."

She did not tell me that my face was narrow and my nose was long, and that I could n't possibly look like Elizabeth Hunter, even with flying ends. I know it now, as

I have found out a good many things that I did n't understand at the time.

I was disappointed, too disappointed to say anything; and before I spoke, mother, who had put the net over my hair and drawn the ribbon, tied a butterfly bow with it over my left ear, and snipped the ends into short dove-tails with her small bright toilet scissors.

I choked a little in my throat, and the tears came into my eyes.

"Did you care so much?" asked mother tenderly, and kissed me again. "But it is a *great deal* prettier for you so; trust me, dear."

I did not speak then, for I could n't; but I tried to swallow the choke and the tears; mother, who was always kind, had been so dearly kind to me that day. And Andrew came running up the stairs just then and bounced in at the door; and there was my dear wax-baby in his arms, and I was a happy little mother; and what happy little mother, with her baby born on New Year's morning, cares how her cap is tied?

The baby was dressed in a pretty white slip and a bib; and there was a blanket with pink scalloped edges, to wrap it in.

"There were dollies a good deal older, and some all grown up," said Andrew; "but father thought you'd want to have it a real baby, and let it grow. And it opens and shuts its eyes. See here! There! it's gone to sleep. And now look at my whip!" He pulled it out from under his arm, whence it trailed behind him, and cracked it gloriously with its yellow snappers, right over my baby's head.

"Oh And! Be careful! Give her right to me. Boys don't know how to tend babies, you know. But you're *real* good; and your whip is splendid!"

"Guess I am! Brought her right straight along, and did n't care a mite, and three boys hollered after me, 'Fore I'd be a girl and carry a rag-baby!' I just kept her with one hand and cracked my whip with the other, and looked right ahead, as if they was n't anywhere!"

I put my arms round his neck, and hugged him and the baby and the whip all together; for my Andie always was a hero, and loved me. He brought me my greatest gift pleasures, and my happiest surprises. Father always took him into the plan, if Andie had n't already begged it for me, — whenever there was one. I think our parents had that notion about son and daughter, and what the little man and woman should be to each other. Mother used to set me to do all the little cheery, comfortable home things for Andie. Andie brought me my wax doll when I was seven years old; he walked down to Jones's with father, the day I was seventeen, and brought me home my real gold watch. I always mended Andie's stockings after I was old enough, — and quite little girls were old enough in those days; and I made pan-ginger bread for his supper when he was coming home cold from coasting on the Common; and I read to him when he was sick with sore throat, and saved money to fill his bag with white alleys when marble-time came round. Andie and I used to promise never to get married, but to keep house with each other when we were grown up. I have never got married; but Andie has been lying in the gray stone tomb at Mount Auburn for thirty years.

My mother hurried me a little now; for Marcella was ready.

We walked down across the Common, Marcella and I; she was to leave me at the door. There was a biting wind, with snow-needles in it; and the path was deep with half-trodden snow; but I was warm in my cloth

pelisse with gray fur cape and border, — my quilted bonnet edged with fur, and my thick little moccasins with gray fur round the ankles.

I was perfectly happy till Mrs. Hunter unfastened my things by the large parlor fire, and lifted off my bonnet carefully.

Elizabeth, with her dimpled face, her sweet-set mouth; her brown curls, among which the long blue ribbon floated, — for the net was a mere matter of ornament, and lay light and loose over the hair, held only by the ribbon band simply tied at the left temple, — was standing by, impatient to get me out and begin our day.

"Why, where are the long ends?" she said. And then I immediately felt as if all there was of me was that one little, short-cropped butterfly bow.

"Mother thought" — I began, and there stopped. My lips trembled a little, and I blushed hot.

Mrs. Hunter looked sorry. "Was she *quite* particular?" she asked, after an instant. "Because I have another ribbon. Just for *to-day*, perhaps, because you like to be like Lizzie? — It would be a pity not to please the child," she said to Mrs. Marchand, her sister, who was there. She was drawing the blue ribbon from her pretty, round, carved work-table, and she put out her hand to untie my little bow.

Then it came over me. I started back. "Please! No! Please not, Mrs. Hunter. Thank you — a great deal" — I stammered, in a hurry, and afraid I was dreadfully impolite, — "but *mother put it on!*"

I would n't have had that bow with the dovetailed ends untied that minute, for all the world.

A singular expression, I thought, passed between the faces of the two ladies. Mrs. Hunter leaned down from her chair, reached my hand, drew me to her again, and

kissed me. "You are a dear little thing," she said to me. "The little souls know best," she said to her sister.

"When the little souls are" — but Mrs. Marchand did not say what.

I wondered why Mrs. Hunter, while she praised me, — but it was not praise either; it was better than that, — should have looked as if she pitied me so. I could n't think it was for the sake of the ribbon. No, indeed: I know now what it was.

We had a beautiful time. Of course I had brought my baby, and I secretly thought it was a great deal cunninger and prettier than Elizabeth's, that she had had ever since her last birthday, and that really looked quite old and common to me now, though she had kept it so nice, and I had admired it so.

Father and Andrew came to dinner; and after dinner we had forfeits, and Hunt the Ring, and Magical Music, and Still Palm. There were three other children who came to spend the afternoon.

I was very happy. There was a hidden corner in my heart that kept warming up every now and then, as if mother and I had a secret together, and we were whispering it to each other across the wide, cold city. Elizabeth's pretty hair and long blue ribbons flew this way and that in the merry play and running; and I noticed them just as I always had, and I knew that there was nothing pretty about my short, plain, light-colored hair, and I *did* think that flying ends would have been a comfort if I could have had them in the first place; but there was something beyond comfort in the loyalty of wearing that butterfly bow which nobody need touch or try to change for me, since — because she thought it best for me to wear it so — my mother had put it on!

I ran straight up to her dressing-room the minute we

got home. She sat there in her white flannel wrapper before the fire. I threw my arms around her and laid my head down on her lap.

"Now untie the little bow," I said; and she asked: "Did my little girl wear it all the day for my sake?"

She understood. We *had* been whispering to each other's thought across all the cold, wide city.

"Mother," I asked her, after I said my prayers, and before I said good-night, "why did I have such a Rocky-Mountain kind of a face? Why could n't God have given me a pretty, *flat* face? Can you tell?"

"God did n't see best to make you handsome, dear; but He will make you beautiful, if you will let Him, his own way. And I don't think," she added, more lightly, and laughing a sweet laugh, "that my Emmie's face *could* be a *flat* one! It would n't suit her at all; and I love this a great deal better!"

When I was seventeen years old, my mother had been dead eight years. I had a step-mother.

That was horrible, you think? Wait till you hear.

When my father — a graver, silenter, but not less kind and gentle man — brought home at last this lady, as truly, I think, for our sakes as his own, he called us to them both as they sat together on the long velvet sofa in the library. I remember the moment, and the look of everything as if it were just now. It was a September mid-day; they had been married in church, and we had all come straight home; there was no company, — "this day was for themselves and the children," — and dinner was going on, almost just as usual, in the dining-room beyond.

The lady, whom we had seen but few times, — her home had been at a distance in the country, — was dressed in a plain violet silk; and now her bonnet was

off, her dark hair looked homelike and simple, just parted away over her low, pleasant forehead and twisted richly behind; and her face—I never forget that about it—was watching the door when we came in.

My father said to me, being the girl and the oldest, “Emmeline, I hope you will be the happier for this day, and I believe you will, from this day forward as long as you and my wife shall live.” He fell, unpremeditatedly, into the words of the Solemn Service that had been spoken over them; it was as if he had married us two, in our new relation, to each other.

He said to Andrew, “My boy knows what men owe to women; he and I must do our best and manliest for these two. We four are a family now.”

The new wife stretched out a hand to each of us. She slipped her arm round me, and drew me to her side, while she held Andrew’s hand upon her knee. The face that looked into mine was very wistful and kind; it almost seemed to beseech something of me. It asked leave to be loving.

We children did not know what to say. I felt uneasy not to speak at all. I believe I smiled a little, shyly. Then I asked:

“What shall I call you, please?”

“What shall they call you, Lucy?” asked my father.

“Call me ‘step-mamma,’” was the answer; and I think he was utterly surprised.

“I will not take their mother’s name away,” she said. “I will not be *instead* of her. I will be called just what I want to be; a step, a link, between her and them. I will try to do *for* her what she would have done if she had stayed.”

“Then I think I’ll call you ‘For-mamma,’” said straight-spoken Andrew. “I think that will do very well.”

We all laughed ; and it relieved the feeling. "Thank you, Andrew," said our step-mamma. "That is a great help at the very beginning. I believe we shall understand each other."

For my part I only kissed her. By the way she kissed me back, I knew it was her first act "for" my mother.

So we began to love her, and we called her "step-mamma." People thought it very odd, and we never explained it to them. We let our relation explain itself. But *among* ourselves, the familiar, privileged, lovely name was "For-mamma." That we kept this sign through so many years, — the years of our troublesome, probative childhood, — tells more than any story of the years could tell.

I only wanted to say a little bit of what she was to me at seventeen ; and how my mother's very words came again to me through her, as by an accepted mediation.

I went with her to a large party ; my very first large grown-up party.

My old friend, Elizabeth Hunter, was a bride this winter. I had been bridesmaid at her wedding : that was the beginning of my coming out, earlier than I should otherwise have done.

What a plain little bridesmaid I had been, to what an exquisite vision of a bride ! I remember thinking, as we, the bridal party, walked through the long rooms, when all was gay, and ceremony was broken through at supper-time — when the rooms rustled with the turning of the groups to look after her and the murmur went along about her beauty — "What difference ought it to make, that *she* is the beauty, and that I can never be, — so long as the beauty *is* and we all feel it?" Yet the strange difference was there, and the cross of my beauty-loving nature was that I, in my own being and movement, could never hold and represent it.

I looked at myself when I had dressed for this large party. The lovely blue silk — the delicate lace — the white roses — they almost achieved prettiness enough of themselves; and I suppose I looked as nice as I could; but there were still the too prominent brows, the nose too big for the eyes, the lips too easily parted over the teeth, fine and white, but contributing to the excess of profile, or middle-face, that had made me call it Rocky-Mountain outline when I was a child.

I went down to my step-mamma's room. She, in her ruby-colored satin, was fairer at thirty-eight than I at seventeen. I sat watching her as she put pearl earrings into her ears.

"For-mamma," I said, "I don't believe I shall ever care much for parties. And it will be for a very mean and selfish reason, too. I think it is only pretty people who can enjoy them much."

She laid down the second pearl hoop on the table, and came to me.

"Emmie," she said, "I know it is a hard thing for a woman who loves all lovely things, not to be very beautiful herself. The dear Lord has not made you very beautiful, in mere features. But can't you wear a plain face awhile, because He has given it to you to wear, and trust to Him to make it lovely in his way and season?"

My step-mamma hardly ever said anything so direct as this to me, about religion. She only lived her religion in a pleasant, comfortable, unassuming way, and kept a light shining by which I saw — without her flashing it upon me like a dark-lantern — into any little selfish or God-forgetful course of my own life. Now, these words came to me — across ten years — the very words said to me in that same room, at that same hour of night. . . . Why — it was the very night! We were going to a New Year's party.

A great heart-beat came up in my throat, and the tears pressed up together into face and eyes, while I felt the kindling of my own look, and saw what it must be by the answering color and the light in hers.

I put my hands out and reached them round her waist as she stood close to me in her beautiful glowing dress, under which a more beautiful heart was glowing brighter.

"I cannot tell you two apart, Mamma and For-mamma!" I said.

We went together to the party. For-mamma had to put her one pearl hoop in her pocket after she got there, for she had forgotten the other on her dressing-table. And what that party was to me I wonder if any grand, lovely, tender church-service ever was to anybody, more or better!

I had a quiet time, compared to some girls who were always rushed after, and rushing through the gay dances. I was politely asked, and I did dance; but not every time; that was as it always was with me. But all the beauty and all the gladness in the whole room was mine; for it was all "the dear Lord's," and He was giving it as He would. "Passing it round," I could n't help thinking — was it irreverent, I wonder? — as the sweet, rich confections were passed round, that were meant, a share in turn, for all. My turn would come. And for my plain, still, Rocky-Mountain face that I was wearing now,—there was a secret between me and some Heart that thought of me across whatever cold and emptiness of wintry way might seem to lie between, like that which had been when in my childish disappointment I wore the simple bit of ribbon that "my mother had put on."

There came a time when I had to give up other beauty. To recognize that it was not for me — yet. Not in all

this long, waiting world, as other people have it. That was harder; yet it was all one. It seemed to me that some people were given at their birth a kind of ticket that opened to them all paradises; and that others were thrust forth, unaccredited, into a life whose most beautiful doors would be shut, one after another, in their faces.

I had to content myself with a fate like my face; a plain pleasantness without great, wonderful delight. A Rocky-Mountain aspect of living, that seemed hard and rough until I got into the heart of it, and let it shut out the fair champaigns, and then it showed me its own depth, and height, and glory.

There was one long, heavy time when For-mamma and I were separated for years. For-mamma was a widow now; we four that had been a family together were we two here and they two there; they *three*, in the other home. And my grandmother, in her feeble, querulous, uncomfortable old age, had nobody to come and live with her and "see her through," as she said. At nearly the same time, For-mamma's sister died, and there were five little children to be cared for. I thought she would never get away from that duty, though mine might see an end. But a new wife came there after a good while, as For-mamma — I *hope* it was as she came — had come to us; and then grandmother died, and nobody could say otherwise than that it was a release. I did not say so; I hate to hear people say that; it is so apt to mean a release for those who outlive. There are long dyings, and brief ones; when it is over, we go back to the well time to measure our loss. Grandmother's dying began almost twenty years before, when her nerves gave out, and her comfort in living was over, and people began to lose patience with her. I looked back to that time, and thought what a bright, handsome woman, fond of her own way, but with such a fine capable way, I could recollect her.

I had tried to do my duty ; it was a piece of life that the same Love had put on me that I had learned — a little — to believe in as a mother's ; and now it was over — “ through,” and For-mamma and I came together again, so gladly !

I suppose everybody thinks we are very fortunate people, and perfectly happy ; for we have plenty of money, and can do all the pleasant things that can be done with money, for ourselves and for others. I suppose many persons think that my five years with Grandmother Cumberland were paid for in the fifty thousand dollars that she left me. I know that they were paid for as they went along, and as I found myself able and cheerful to live them.

For-mamma and I *are* happy ; I do not think we shall ever leave each other now so long as we both may live. I often think how my father joined us together with those words.

We have a lovely and dear home, and friends to fill it when we want them ; we have happy errands to many who get some happiness through our hands ; we have traveled together, and seen glorious and wonderful things ; we read and think, we sing and sew, we laugh and talk and are silent together ; we do not let each other miss or want. But, for all this we have each — and both together — our troubles to bear, that would not have been worthy to be called troubles if they had stirred in us so slightly as to have been forgotten long ago.

We only bear them as things grown tender to us by their very pain and pressure, because of Some One who will say to us when we go home to Him :

“ *Did my dear child wear it all the day for My Sake ?* ”

BUTTERED CRUSTS.

I.

THE ERRAND.

"You might do half a dozen better things," said Great-aunt Salva, rather crossly.

Grand-niece Thankful's ball of green crewel rolled off her lap, across the piazza, in whose wide house doorway Miss Peniworth and Thankful Holme were sitting. Something was apt to roll or drop or call attention with this young girl, so as to leave Aunt Salva unanswered for the moment, when an answer would be difficult.

"And I don't see," resumed the old lady, as Thankful came back to her low wicker chair opposite, with the recovered wool, "I *don't* see what you can find worth while in a piece of work like that!"

There was really no manner of relation between the two sentences, save consecutiveness and the conjunctive particle, and perhaps the mood which ran along in unity under either subject. The little word "and" very often serves simply in such signification.

"I'm not doing much of it," replied Thankful cheerily, tackling the last and least complicated proposition. "It's Mrs. Rolson's album sofa-cover; this crocus patch is all of my share."

And she held up a lovely lozenge of tender green, with tall blade leaves of darker shade, conventionally outlined, and slender stalks with yellow cup corollas thrown across it.

"It's a nice way to get work and worsteds out of other people," said Miss Peniworth. "It's all of a piece with weddings and silver weddings, and birthday At-Homes, and such trash. I suppose it will come to living altogether by a contribution box, one of these days."

"Not one of *these* days, Aunt Salva, I guess. One of the days of the kingdom of heaven, maybe."

"Kingdom of laziness, I should say!"

"When everybody would be busy doing something for somebody else!"

"Why don't you go to Europe with the Overoffens?"

"I don't feel prepared to take in Europe yet."

"Or spend the winter in Washington, then? I know Mrs. Colonel Stalworth wants you."

"I don't care enough for the present chapter of United States history. I'd rather review or skip."

"Humph! Well, stop in New York with me."

Thankful laid her work in her lap, and looked across at Miss Peniworth with the most enchanting frankness.

"We should quarrel in a week, and I should hate to do that with you."

"With me? Or — with what?" — Miss Peniworth dropped her voice and stopped, ashamed. She jerked her head aside, but her eyes flashed keenly and covertly at Thankful athwart that motion.

"With you, Aunt Salva, and what you've got, but won't own up to," the girl boldly answered to her meaning with as quick a flash — "a real good heart, underneath all your — terribleness."

"P-t-z!" ejaculated Miss Peniworth, shrugging her shoulders in fit gesture for the catlike utterance. But it was all in sound and gesture. She could not get the sputter into her face over which an involuntary relaxation shimmered.

"It only *shows*," she resumed presently, "that your grandmother knew what she was about when she made your coming of age to be when you was four times seven instead of three. That was a clear sug-gacity!"

Tense, construction, and pronunciation sometimes yielded to Aunt Salva's intensity when uttering herself upon subjects that lay close to her convictions.

"I'm quite satisfied," returned Thankful. "Grand-mamma ordered me a sufficient allowance, and I may use it wherever I please."

"Put it into the family sieve at Broadtop! and take out a little bread and butter that you'll have to eat amongst a troop of slopping children with nursery discipline going on over the teacups! Well, I suppose you think you're sharp, but when it gets too much for you, or your pocket, maybe you'll be happy to come over to me."

"Auntie Salvie, they're as *proud* at Broadtop as you are! And that's just why you can't understand each other. And if I'm sharp, or a little bit kin-and-kind also, it only *shows*"—and a touch of mimicry pointed her speech without malice—"that I've got just two or three things by inheritance besides my money. And the little Frosts are lovely. Only Laura has too much to do with the blessed crowd. And I want to live in a home."

"Girls are always in a hurry for a home. There's the usual way to get it, I suppose; to say nothing of its being all ready made for you here, if you chose to appreciate it."

Thankful jumped up rather suddenly, and went to look nearer at something which she had been partly watching while the talk had gone on.

As she does so, let me explain—as I must do somewhere—with all the conciseness possible, the position and relation of affairs obscurely indicated in the current conversation.

Thankful Holme had been an orphan for five years, living here in a pleasant old country house with her grand-mamma Peniworth. By three successive marriages, in the third of which was no survivor of the first, herself and two much older step-sisters, both now some time married, had been left with no real blood-tie between them, save a distant-cousinship, the father of Charlotte and Laura Peniworth having been a half-nephew of Aunt Salva's, and the second husband of his widow having become in his turn a widower, and then married old Madam Peniworth's daughter, Thankful's mother.

There was no love lost, as people bitterly say, between the old Peniworths and the "Robert Peniworth" branch; and nothing had won upon the prejudice in the case of the young Peniworth sisters, who — Laura especially — had fallen under ban and displeasure by many a childish, and even maturer, showing of dislike and a ready pugnacity, when pressed by interference or authority.

"You are paring those apples too thick," Aunt Salva had said to her one day when she was seven years old. It was in the Robert Peniworth dining-room, and Miss Salva was only a morning visitor.

"I'm paring them for my mother," the little girl had replied, letting fall, as she spoke, a strip, or almost slice, of particularly fleshy rind.

"I should quite suppose so," sniffed Miss Salva coolly, and the child had understood, and her eyes had blazed.

In these later days, the very last time Miss Salva had made one of her duty-and-decency appearances at Broad-top (for the Peniworths might not lose love, yet neither would they lose dignity by manifest family splinterings), she admonished Laura that she was cutting some cloth to less advantage than might be possible by doubling and piecing, upon which the young matron had run her scis-

sors rapidly through with a most capable and satisfied air, vouchsafing no notice.

"I *wonder* at you!" Aunt Salva cried, with indignation and affront.

"Now, Auntie Sal!" said Mrs. Laura, holding her shining steels apart in air as dripping from the slaughter, and looking straight in Miss Peniworth's face with exasperating imperturbability, "suppose you just wonder, please, and I'll cut?"

And after that Miss Peniworth had not gone to Broadtop for now more than a year. So that matters were not smoothing out at all in the roughened relationship.

One thing more needs to be stated. At the marriage of each grand-niece, Miss Peniworth had given pride and conscience "a cold potato and let them go," by presenting the bride with three thousand-dollar bonds of the Liberty Loan and Trust Company, with the distinct declaration that it was all either was to expect, and the prophecy that it would n't last longer than till the wedding gowns were out of fashion. The old lady was known to keep a careful watch, through her Boston banker, upon all the sales of the company's bonds, and to have repeatedly changed other stocks into investments therein, "because there was nothing better," she said; but Stewart and Laura Frost believed she would put her last shilling into L. L. and T., rather than miss the chance of coming across numbers 149-154 inclusive of 1888, when any of them should be in transition from "those girls'" unthrifty fingers.

Miss Salva lived in New York in an elegant small house on Thirty-first street, with a housekeeper-companion, a cook, and a man servant. She had one eye on Laura at Broadtop, and the other on Charlotte at Brooklyn, "for satisfaction," if not for aid and comfort; and

she thought now to hold some rein of management in Thankful's affairs, although a queer surprise befell her here at times.

The young lady did not offensively "take the bits between her teeth," but she did not always seem to have them in her mouth. Aunt Salva, as now, often pulled upon something that neither resisted nor obeyed. That, perhaps, was the difference between Holme and Peniworth.

Thankful was very fond of Laura, who had been a tall girl at home during the early years of the little step-sister's childhood, and had indulged and companionized her, and had told her that they were "step-sisters" only because it was such a long step between them over the twelve birthdays.

So Thankful was quite resolved on spending this first winter of her independence with the Stewart Frosts at Broadtop, a pretty town in the hill country of northern New Jersey.

At present we have left her bent upon some special investigation which has drawn her off, for the second time, from Miss Peniworth's argument. A large brown spider had been busily hanging her evening web between the swinging sprays and twisted stems of an old luxuriant creeper and a pillar of the broad piazza. She had dropped, huge and hairy, trailing her long threads and swaying in the softly-moving wind, until she had caught on this side and on that, making fast her mainstays; then, in a favoring puff, had stretched a horizontal, and built more lines on that; and now she was weaving and knotting, back and forth, round and round, closing in and up to her focus, literally her hearthplace.

Thankful stood peering into the shadow among the vine-twigs, and watched the last short parallels and joins,

as the creature, shrunk with her long spinning, ran and fastened them, and at last sat herself down, withered and weary, at the solitary self-centre she had wrought around.

"Oh, *what's* the use?" cried Thankful, which ejaculation Miss Salva naturally, though with some puzzled effort, connected with what had been last spoken.

"Use? Why, to *be* somewhere. To have things of your own to yourself. That's a home."

"Well, she's got it. And it is n't a home after all. It's *all* to herself. And she is n't much of anything as a result. She was a good deal bigger when she began. And I believe they eat up their husbands, too — some sorts — when they have any, don't they?"

"What on earth are you talking about, Thankful Holme?"

"Why, spiders, Aunt Salva. I would n't be a spider for any consideration whatever. Just to spin and spin, and double and twist and tie up, laying out lines for myself, and then sit withered up in the middle of them. I'll never have a spider home as long as I live!"

Aunt Salva sat as mute as the spider. Perhaps the application reached farther and keener than pleased her, or than Thankful at all meant, as was perfectly evident; so that there was nobody to be angry at. Maybe the thing struck Thankful herself when it had been said; for she added with swift and slightly remote recurrence as she came back to her chair once more:

"Besides, I've fallen in love with Bobby, and must cast in my lot with him now."

A minute after, with the curious appositeness that rules in words and things illustrating and reflecting each other in their befallings, the Bobby referred to projected himself upon the scene, coming through the house from the back, a small boy of six, with a large, glossy-brown bun

in one hand, and a pink-and-golden peach in the other, with which he crossed the piazza into the shade of the great Norway spruces close in front.

"Fenella gave them to me," he called, looking back when he had set himself in a needle-strewn nook like a little image in a green shrine. "And she said I might eat my supper out of doors. And, Aunt Thankful," he went on with solemn deliberation, "I've come-cluded that I don't want to go back to Broadtop right away presently. I *like* that girl — to distraction!"

After Thankful's burst of laughter at the pat parody of her own confession, he continued in precisely the same manner as one interrupted inconsequently, but not so to be discomposed: "Well, I do, and you too. I don't like groaned-up folks usually. They're pretty always tired or busy, or can't spare things, or they have a bone in their foot. But you don't. And Fenella gives me buns; and when I have bread and butter, you always butter the crusts."

"I guess if you're going to Broadtop or going to bring Broadtop here, to butter crusts, you'll have your hands full — and none too much butter!" exclaimed Aunt Salva as she gathered up her mended stockings and took herself slowly away up the fine old staircase.

"The crusts are all you need take much pains to butter, it seems to me," said Thankful to herself and Bobby. "It spreads down easy enough into the soft parts. And yet there's where most people persist in just dabbing it on."

"*She's* awfully groaned-up, is n't she," said Bobby Frost, coming in at the door and tossing his old head over his young shoulder towards the landing behind whose balusters Miss Peniworth's silk skirts were grandly sweeping.

That Bobby happened to be here at all, to be fallen in love with and to have his crusts buttered, was due first to whooping-cough, from which he was recovering, and to complete which recovery his father had brought him to Norchester on his own way, on business, to Boston; leaving him with an Aunt Frost whose home was a mile away toward Graveham from the Peniworth place. That he should come to Thankful, though she earnestly entreated it, had been quite out of the question with Mrs. Laura. "To tumble in my children upon her the moment her house becomes her own!" she said indignantly. "That would be quite too much that the Peniworth prophecies might be fulfilled!" But Thankful had got him for day visits: and he had quite well learned his own way over across by the lane and in at the back door, as he had come at the present time, his trunk being to follow from Aunt Frost's, and he to spend a final day or two here for Thankful's "own better convenience," before she should take the care of him home to Broadtop, as had been under some protest conceded.

So, directly after Miss Salva's short stop at the "Evergreens," on her autumn trip from Old Orchard to Princeton, on her return home to New York, and curiously coincident with Bobby's sojourn — the "Evergreens" was shut up; it was forbidden by the will to be "sold, let, lent, or otherwise alienated or put to any use except that of the occupancy of Thankful Holme and her proper and natural household, should she elect to live there" (this also had been a "suggacity"); and Bobby and Aunt Thankful made their rail and steamer trip to New York and thence onward by morning train, an hour's distance into New Jersey; where, walking up from the little station in the hollow at which they alighted, they found themselves at the door of a modest, olive-green house, with

mahogany-colored blinds and a red roof, upon "The Slope" at Broadtop.

Broadtop was divided by topography and social lines into three parts, of successive rising order and importance; the "Plain," the "Slope," and the "Brim." Within or behind the "Brim," an avenue skirting the edge of Broadtop Hill, upon which the fine houses of the high-privileged were built, commanding with cool, breezy superiority the level and lowly world below, made and maintained that the Brim might have a "view" and a foundation, lay the sacredly environed and secluded "Round," a kind of green park into which all the gardens of the Brim opened, and so issued in a common pleasure-ground for this literal upper circle of inhabitants. It was all as definite and beautifully discrete as Dante's Paradise or Swedenborg's Three Heavens.

Mr. and Mrs. Stewart Frost were on the ascending middle line; not very far up, but prettily terraced where they stood: they might climb higher or slip downward by some future change. Ethelind and Celia Frost, in their early teens, were growing just old enough to begin to appreciate the palpable and impalpable facts of life which these zones and selvages signified; the former wished fervently, both openly and in secret, that they "belonged up on the Brim," and the latter had experienced a wound whose scar would remain a memory in the flesh long years after the hurt had been healed and laughed at, when Livia Sternhaugh had one day publicly pronounced her "only a village girl!" A week's excitement, half hilarity and half discontent, resulted with them from every infrequent afternoon ecstasy of lawn-tennis in the Round. They had their lessons at home; they had not been invited to the governess-and-masters arrangement for the young "round-heads," and the town school on the flat would not do at all.

At this moment they were away upon an errand in the lower street. Mrs. Frost was busy with some matters that had taken her to the topmost room in the house; the "middies," two boys nearly nine and eleven, were at school, public instruction being well enough for them at present; the travelers had not been expected until a later train, so that nobody happened to meet and welcome them but two gray cats, sitting like the Northumberland lions, one on each ramp of the doorstone, whom Bobby hailed and introduced tumultuously as "One-ey" and "Two-ey."

"Forcause they are twins, and came here together," he exclaimed. "There's another, that we had afterward. She's Oddy-doddy, and she's yellow."

This was charming. Thankful felt already at home, and that home had a distinctive character.

Yet when the door was opened she had time to notice, while Laura was hastening down at the shout of her boy, that hall and stair carpets were dim and shabby with the tread of so many incessant young feet, and that there was a certain discouraged expression in the trail of a pre-æsthetic table cover, and the irregular gathering of small inevitables upon a crowded mantel in the open dining-room.

On Laura's part, after the first warm embrace and eager utterance of pleasure, her glance ran rapidly from its scanning of the pretty, blooming face, over the girl's faultless equipment, with the last fresh touch of perfect "style" upon it, from the neat little poke of the picturesque but modest bonnet-brim, down along double-buttoned, jaunty-pocketed jacket of soft, beautiful, coarse and costly wool-stuff, to scarfed and kilted skirt of camel's hair, with chatelaine-bag of silken plush, girdled aslant, ending with the "eight-dollar-if-eighty-cents" boots, all of which Laura instinctively inventoried, not with the pomp and vanity

side of her, but with the mother-keenness that joined involuntarily the thought of "her girls," and the sight of things so altogether nice and so altogether unattainable.

But we must let these first glances represent much subsequent insight and comparison, and must plunge more abruptly and disconnectedly "*in medias res*;" picking up our crusts here and there, instead of regularly slicing the loaf, if we are to butter them, as suitably proposed in a few sketchy chapters.

It might not have been very different with Thankful and her early days at Broadtop, had nothing been said or illustrated by "battered crusts." It was her nature to smooth and appetize things, and to begin with the difficulties, seizing them with quick and valorous apprehension, letting the easy spots take care of themselves; but to any such fitness almost always comes a word spoken plainly into the life as errand or message, henceforth to make conscious root and motive in it, and order work with purpose. "Battered Crusts" had so come to Thankful, and formulated a mere happy proneness to a principle.

She had come to her step-sister's home to make it the pleasanter for her coming if she could; to share and lift a little the bothers and perplexities she knew of or could guess, instead of going off to have just her own good time with her own; and the accidental sign had given her a key and watchword. From her first entrance that October morning she kept an outlook for bits of crusts to butter, as if they had been so many four-leaved clovers that it meant good luck to find; and with every one she found came indeed some scrap of luck or easement to the household, sometimes directly recognized and sometimes not; but what mattered it which, so long as the good taste got into things and the family fare was made comfortable to the family palate?

"If we get over Sunday and Monday without notice of intent to quit, we can breathe the rest of the week," said Mrs. Laura as the housework adjutant-general departed one morning, with her orders for the wash-day lunch, and a handful of overlooked small wear of the children's. "We just weathered it this time."

"I think it's the breakfasts," said Thankful. "'Thunder in the morning, sailors take warning.' And the thunder comes early, I've noticed, if at all."

"We must have breakfasts, nevertheless."

Another weather proverb occurred to Thankful which she did not quote: "Evening gray and morning red, etc." The signs, or the gathering, began, she thought, over-night.

So the next Sunday morning when Runy in big hat and feather came down before the family to go to early mass, her eyelids lifted to a parallel with the high tilt of the hat brim at sight of the long dining-room table—usually a litter of evening and weekly papers, children's games and school-books, maybe a stray hat or handkerchief or two, possibly an emptied milk glass and a plate of biscuit crumbs or fruit parings, with the large lamp awaiting removal and replenishing in the midst of all, and a huddle of chairs pushed about at various angles of relinquishment around it—nicely spread for the morning meal, complete to the salts and cruet-stand, with the white hen waiting for her eggs at the corner, and the water pitcher on its green tray opposite.

And the same thing happened on the Monday also.

"Bless her kind soul, and it's I that'll say a prayer for it!" was Runy's Sunday exclamation, remembering Thankful with her writing materials the last in the room when she herself went up through it the night before. And for the Monday's breakfast she just stopped in her first sudsing

to "bobble up" some Graham griddle-batter for the cakes "Miss Thankful" liked.

"I was up late with my letters," Thankful explained to her effusion afterward, "and I happened to think of it. It's so much better to have things ready over night for a busy morning. I'd bring up my coal and kindlings, besides, if I were you, Runy."

And between the two there went on weeks of Sundays and Mondays, when there were neither lowering sunsets nor lurid dawns.

"I never can persuade that child to go of an errand," said Laura another day in despair. "He's ready enough with anything but a set message, and he is n't shy of visiting, but to go and say ten words and come away again — one might as well ask him to go and have a tooth pulled. I can't understand it."

Thankful interviewed Bobby afterward on her own account.

"'Tain't *goin'*," said the unwilling little Mercury, "and 'tain't *sayin'*"; but — Aunt Thankye, how do you" —

"Well, 'how' what?"

"It's easy enough to get into people's houses, you know," he replied with a rush of candor, "but the thing is, you see, how do you get out?"

"Oh! well, that's just the prettiest part of it, when you once know how to do it right. But it takes a little practice. Where's your hat?"

"It's a great deal easier for a boy because of the hat," resumed Thankful when that article had been put into her hand. "Now look: You are Mrs. Snow. I am Bobby Frost. Good-morning, Mrs. Snow."

She held the hat easily by the rim between thumbs and

fingers, gently handling, but not fidgeting with it, and looked straight at Mrs. Snow.

"Mamma sent me to say that you might keep the Club books over her week this time, if you wish, for she is very busy with a dressmaker, and making grape jelly, and can't read more than the magazines. (Now it's your turn, Mrs. Snow. You always have half the wretchedness, you know. I've nothing to do but listen, and take care of my hat.)"

Mrs. Snow stared; Bobby Frost had never been sent to her with half so long an agony before. Then she laughed and ventured to answer, entering into the game.

"Tell your mamma I'm very muthsh oblihtzhed," she said, mixing up her dignity with Bobby Frost's occasional inimitable lisp.

Then Thankful turned toward the door. ("Mrs. Snow ought to come with me and show me out") she parenthesized, ("but if she does n't, it's no matter. I've only got one thing more to say, and one thing more to do with my hat, and it's over.")

She put one hand on the door-latch, raised the hat with the other by a truly gentlemanly lift of the elbow, letting the brim incline lightly toward her right ear, said "Good morning, Mrs. Snow," and disappeared.

"Oh, but Aunt Thankye," called out Bobby into the entry, "she does very often say more things, and tells me it's a pleasant day, and I'm a nice boy, and can't I stay longer. And then" —

"Well, why did n't you say them?" asked Aunt Thankye, coming back. "You were Mrs. Snow. I'll begin again if you want to. But it's only to answer, 'Yes, ma'am,' or 'Thank you,' or 'Not now, I thank you,' and go, just the same, whenever she stops. She'll do that by the time you're at the door. *Two good-morn-*

ings, your *message*, your *hat*, and the *door*, are all you've got to think of. The rest is her business."

And the drill was repeated with variations and laughter, and exchange of parts, until Bobby rushed away to his mother, shouting ecstatically, "I'll go all your messithzhes now, mamma. Ain't you got any ready? I know every bit how now; and Aunt Thankye has put a new ribbon on my hat, and she says that when you fix 'em right, all the hard things are thizhest the comforblest!"

After this, Bobby made a pride and practice of conning his mother's errands, and rehearsing them to Aunt Thankful, with something of the hat drill, on every occasion; his trial had become his diversion; it was a bit of amateur theatricals, and a development of decided talent; mamma was no longer troubled to put everything "in a note," because he "could n't pothsibly say it all right," and the only contretemps which ever happened was when one day the Mrs. Snow of the occasion, finding some little difficulty of her own in answering as directly and positively as she felt was proper, rather mixed up her part of the play and came to a doubtful halt, so that Bobby hardly knew whether or not he had got it all, or his regular cue for beginning to depart; and the pause continuing, he looked up with a puzzled remonstrance, and gently whispered, "Ain't you goin' to finish *your* half of the wrethshedness?"

"You've taken *one* gray hair out of my head!" said Mrs. Laura to her step-sister.

Most trivial of crusts; yet small, hard corners in the daily bread. Lightest of frets and strains, yet stealing some bright color, as from one hair at a time, out of mother-life and strength.

Thankful was no all-or-nothing errand-worker; she was quite willing to begin and persevere with bits and edges.

II.

BITS AND EDGES.

THE long walk would be nothing were there no pebble in the shoe. When great cares worried Mrs. Laura, it was not themselves so much as the trifles hindering her grappling with them, that upset her patience. A ragged corner to her tablecloth, a child's hat lost, a little dust overlooked or waiting the brush, would make the world weary to her, more than comparing the butcher's bill with the balance in her cash box, or facing the Wednesday clothes-sorting or the Friday sweep. It was so even in her dealings with her children. If they would have kept always fresh and comfortable to look upon, she could have met with less annoyance their vicissitudes of temper, their interruptions, their little disobediences.

"I could bear with Bobby better if it was n't for his buttons," was her impetuous utterance one wild day of nursery cyclones, and the alliteration in trochaics had passed into the family proverbial philosophy.

Thankful set herself to remedy the buttons. If Mistress Peggoty, of immortal memory, had to sacrifice her buttons to her emotions, how was a boy of six, with the impulse and activity of growing man-force within him, with steel-spring limbs, and india-rubber muscles to give it play, to keep small trousers and shirt-waists together? Bobby Frost was always presenting himself to his mother in a solution of continuity. Thankful invented the simple expedient of strong, close, elastic loops under the trouser-bands, instead of button-holes. Bobby was thenceforth clothed, and Mrs. Laura in her right mind.

Likewise with chance disorders about the house. She forestalled the nettle-fret of these by early morning raids,

into which she gradually drew the elder girls; for she would by no means take altogether upon herself that which it was their natural duty to do. "Come, girls!" she would say, after breakfast, and that meant what Ethelind called "ordering out the special police," who from room to room cleared away rapidly every little eyesore and fidget, so that all the domestic thoroughfares were straightened and opened up for mamma's ten o'clock parade.

For a while the unplaceable matter, which is rubbish — as "matter out of place is dirt" — was the bore within the bother; odds and ends of work or play which might perhaps be finally disposed of, but might be wanted again; especially scraps of Mr. Frost's property, or little calculations or memoranda which he would leave about, expecting to find them in the same spot after any interval. An old letter, perhaps, on the top of the silver basket, laid there on carrying up at night, that it might be remembered; the need for remembrance not occurring, possibly, for several days. What to do with it meantime? And four children, with their pencils, paper, tools, playthings, treasures, old and new, brought forth, but seldom carried back, often left a trail after them like that of a small tornado.

Thankful founded two institutions; a "hash-box," and a capacious wall-pocket: the first for juvenile miscellanies, the second sacred to the father of the family, wherein he might depend on finding whatever he had left upon the sands within the sweep of morning tidying-tide. These things worked admirably; life ebbed and flowed in small details, like a summer sea. If it could only have been the same with the anxieties and perplexities, which Thankful would "fain, fain" have grappled with also! She could count seven family wants at this very moment.

But she had to bide her time among the lesser comforts she had created.

The Middies wanted to have a birthday party. They would be nine and eleven years old on the ninth and eleventh days of November. This coincidence of numbers would never occur again. The tenth was their day to celebrate, and should certainly be celebrated now. Ethelind and Celia wanted to join a French conversation class, and to have winter jerseys, one cardinal-red, the other ocean-blue. Mrs. Frost wanted new carpeting for her hall and stairs. Mr. Frost needed a new overcoat. Bobby wanted vociferously a "bisuckle, or less a new sled." The "mighty mite," or "Madge the midget," wanted a plush coat and hood, and did n't care anything about it.

Thankful turned things in her mind, as if they had been her own puzzle. Which might, and in what way, be managed? Which achieved, would leave widest margin for the rest? It was a game at solitaire.

Most conspicuously and literally the carpet blocked the way. It was a king-card topping the pile. It blocked more than expenditure; it hindered social welcome. It discouraged house-ordering and easy adorning. What good in crewel cat-o'-nine-tails and fleur-de-lis, that only mocked and flaunted the hole at the doorway? Under the mat, truly; but how hateful was that!

Thankful meditated; then one morning she spoke.

"There's another old stair-carpet in the attic, Laura," she said.

"Two of 'em," said Laura bitterly. "Each died its own lingering death."

"I saw one with a crimson border."

"The other's brown. And the middles are both gone."

"And this is old-gold and olive, and this middle is —

in decline. There's a dark olive-green drugget up there *not* worn out."

"I know. Charlotte sent me that when they moved. It was on her little library."

"I'd throw away the middles, and take the borders; then I'd cut the drugget into narrow strips. The colors are all lovely with each other. I know a way with macramé twine to make seams and edges; I'd put them together; I'd paint a dark-green floor-border; and I would n't thank you for inlaid woods and Daghestan!"

"I would *you*, though! Thankye, you're a born contriver!"

"*Non nascitur*. Only a 'fit.' I take one now and again. It uses me up, though. Make the most of me while the full strength's on. Let's go to work."

And up in the attic they did go to work; Midget Madge and Bobby blissful among forgotten and unknown treasures — a gracious rain hammering upon the skylights, and Runy digging out tacks from the carpet below, fearless of door-bells. When Stewart Frost came home that night, and for several nights thereafter, he stepped in upon a clean, bare floor which thrust unspoken misgivings upon his mind as to how Frau Laura expected to cover it again; for he had quite agreed with her statement, that "when that carpet was shaken it would shake into shoddy."

The third night a broad painted band of Venetian red lay along the edges. And two or three more days went on in a masonic mystery.

On the Saturday evening, under the clear light of a high-raised double-burner, with an extra illumination at the landing above, stretched beautiful completed pathways in lines of old-gold and olive, dark-red and russet, mysteriously joined with ribs of strong, soft gray, upon dividing stripes of deep, dull green. The ends were fastened down by brass rings around bright-headed screws.

"New style," said Laura complacently.

"How much?" inquired Stewart concisely.

"Let me see. Twine, paint, tacks, rings, screws — about two dollars and seventy-five cents."

"Carpet left out."

"Carpet-rinds brought out — with flying colors! Thank Thankye. And to-morrow order your overcoat and draw upon a saved-up balance in my bureau-drawer, that is n't otherwise wanted."

That scored off two things, and literally paved the way for the Middies' party. But with this arose fresh difficulty — supper favors.

"Everybody always has a basket full right after the ice-cream," said first Middy, laying down the law.

"Steamboats, and elephants, and locomotives, and camels, and wheelbarrows, and jackstraws, and" —

"Fans," supplied Madge.

"O yes, p-f-ans!" finished second Middy, with boy-scorn that took two consonants.

"If your party depends on that," said Mrs. Laura calmly, "I think it will have to wait a few years till papa's ship comes in."

"I don't believe that ship has ever started yet, or ever *will* get here!" And "No more don't I!" ejaculated the two Middies in rapid order.

"Oh, I *wish* you would only" — began Thankful.

"Don't wish, Thankye, for you know I won't," broke in Laura, as quick of response as the boys.

"It is n't christian," remonstrated Thankful. "It's just what you'd wish in my place."

"And just what you would n't do in mine," retorted unmanageable Mrs. Laura.

"Well! I see the beauty of first and last exchanging places. When people try each other's predicaments they'll

learn just what they do want. It takes double reflections — mirrors set opposite — to get the everlasting view. Blessed are those that have n't looked in the glass and yet have behaved themselves. Don't despair, boys; there's a way out through *bushel* basket-fulls of won'ts and can'ts!"

The next day she said meekly to Laura, "Will you give me one dollar for the supper favors, to spend at discretion?"

And Laura quite gravely counted out three quarters, two ten-cents, and a nickel from her small-change box.

"If you will please return memorandum of disbursements," she said.

"Oh, yes; charging shopping commission!" cried Thankful jubilantly, for the birthday party was thus admitted for granted.

"No supper favors, and nothing particular to do!" exclaimed Ethelind gloomily. "What is the use of asking those boys from the Brim?"

"To let them brim over," answered Thankful; but Ethelind was not so sure they would appreciate that.

Thankful took herself into council, with a scrap she had cut from a newspaper column.

"Bubble parties — all the rage in London — oleate of soda' (whatever that is), 'and glycerine.' First of all, I'll go to a chemist."

"Points and results" must be the motto in brief limits.

"Right after the ice-cream," on the evening of the tenth — the boys from the Slope having come in joyful numbers, and some "real good fellows" even from the Flat, while the half-dozen from the Brim came to see what they would make of it, and additionally because they were boys, after all, with like proclivities for ice-cream

and cakes with the ordinary sort — “Miss Thankye,” as they all fell into calling her, unfastened a quiver-shaped straw basket that hung from the gasalier above the birthday cakes with their garlands of nine and eleven stars — and began dispensing its rather curious contents. At the same time, a large bowl was set at the end of the table, which had been rapidly cleared, and along which Mrs. Frost had thrown a double length of crimson blanket that glowed rich and soft under the bright light. Thankful meanwhile went round with the favors. These were to each boy and girl a pipe prettily decorated by herself in oil colors, and an accompanying little bottle of some thickish, semitransparent fluid, the stopper daintily tied down with a narrow ribbon of red, blue, or gold-color.

“Magic pipes and elixir of sunbeams,” she exclaimed as she went about, “to blow such bubbles as you never heard of, and to carry home for blowing more.”

Then there was an eager gathering round the big bowl, and a blowing in turn of great, filmy, marvelously tenuous globes, that swelled and thinned till countless glorious changes of crimson, rose, flame-color, primrose, blue, pale-violet, were reflected in them, sweeping and blending round their lovely curves as they dropped on the soft woollen, or floated like a little universe of liquid planets in the lighted space. And they rolled or wafted till the room seemed full. They even piled one upon another. The children caught them on their hands and blew them off again; they raced them; they played fairy-tennis with them; and by and by came ringings at the door announcing carriages and servants, and word was brought in for most reluctant departures, only comforted by the future delight sealed up for them in Miss Thankful’s cheap but enchanting party-favors.

“Nothing particular to do?” It had been more par-

ticular, more stunningly successful, than anything on record from Brim to Basin.

"Those Frosts know things, anyhow!" was Kist Sternerhaugh's verdict as he went up the hill, and Win Trupeare shouted back:

"You bet they do! And how to pick out a fair sort of fellows, too, here or there. It was just a first-rate crowd and time; and that Aunt Thankye is a queen of trumps, and I say it!"

Thankful rendered in her account to Laura in the morning, with a charge of fifteen cents exceeded on the ribbons.

The Mite was at her mightiest that next morning. Bubbles, ice-cream, nine o'clock, had keyed her up to concert-pitch, and she would n't come down. Double elder sister power failed to persuade her properly into her clothes. The steel button-hook fell on her bare knee as Celia struggled with her boots. That closed the electric circuit. There came shock and outcry. Thankful looked in from her opposite room.


"She won't have her stockings strapped, and she wants everything done wrong end foremost, as she has got out of bed. Look at her hat!" cried Celia.

Bare-legged and bare-shouldered, her little petticoats hanging about her unfastened, Midget had set the gay-lined hat, with its perk Alsatian bow turned round behind, in a wild, determined slant over her uncombed curls. The face beneath was full of naughty fun, dashed with crossness.

"My Oddy-doddy is crying for me," she said. "Out in the yard. And they won't be quick at all."

"Boiling up with mischief, and crusty with contrariness, she is, the crater," said Ethelind, out of her towel.

"And they drop cold things on me," plained away the Midget. "And they have gone down my stocking."



"Which they would n't have done if the little straps had been clasped," said Thankful, stooping down to the work Celia had left in indignation.

"Or if she had n't jumped like a grasshopper, and stuck her elbow into my eye," said injured Celia.

"Once there *was* a grasshopper," Thankful began at random, catching at the word, and drawing up the stocking out of which she had fished the offending hook.

"Well?" encouraged Madge, suffering the strap to be fastened, and magnanimously offering the other leg.

"And he was hopping gently along in the field under a row of hedge. It had rained the night before; little drops were hanging, round and shiny, on the stems and branches. One of them fell from the end of a twig (here the hat was tossed off and the petticoat buttoned), and caught on a spire of grass (sponge, Ethel!), and bent — it — down — (now towel and brush!) and so slid — right on — to Mr. Grasshopper's knee, which was kinked up behind him; '*Chow!*' says the grasshopper; and he frightened three ladybugs, and a spider, and a long-legs, and gave a great jump, right — over — the bushes — (now the little gown!) into the next field, where he had never been in all his life. And what do you think he came down in? People never know how that will be when they cry out at little troubles, and jump without looking. It was a miserable — dirty — yellow puddle. And he did n't have time to say '*Chow!*' It was too serious to speak about this time. It took him all the forenoon to get out again, and to dry himself on a clean rock in the sun. What if the rocks and trees said '*Chow!*' and jumped up out of the ground and made a great earthquake, when the rain came down on them? Why, if things did n't keep bravely and pleasantly in their places, a little drop of water might upset the world! There; now you're all ready — do you see?"

"Well, I did n't expect to be so good," piped the Midget, apologetically. "Only, for I am, I guess I'll go and find my Oddy-doddy."

"That the 'tragedy of the unexpected' has happened, let us be content," remarked Thankful, getting up to go also.

"Yes, till to-morrow morning," said Celia. "But whoever's to invent grasshoppers, and crickets, and katydids, and kangaroos, to keep up with her jumps, is going to have a lively time of it—all except getting to breakfast themselves!"

"'Sufficient unto the day,'" quoted Thankful, disappearing.

"Sufficient unto the *Saturdays*, anyway," suggested Ethelind, significantly.

"Oh Ethel!" wailed Celia. "My stocking-bag! Unto a solid *week* of Saturdays!"

"Should n't have a stocking-bag," admonished Ethelind, severely wise. "What's the use of keeping miseries stored up by the sackful?"

"Oh, I know, you're always for grabbing things by the throat, and making a deadly tussle, to have it over with. But it is n't. It comes round every week."

"Why a tussle at all?" sounded cheerily from Thankful's side again.

"Oh Aunt Thankye! I just do hate mending, of course!" To which Thankful quietly answered:

"So do I."

"Well, then?" triumphantly.

"In the abstract."

"Oh! if it would only stay in the abstract, I would n't bother with hating. It's always—the other thing."

"And so," continued Thankful, "I always make the concrete comfortable. Dainties *se laissent manger*. Mend-

ing is a thing to take a relish with. Bring yours to my room to-day."

"May I come too? With Oddy-doddy?" cried out Madge, struggling up the stairs with the yellow cat in her arms.

"Will you be concrete?" Celia demanded awfully.

"Yes. Or I'll see about it. What is con-treat?"

"Sorry and ashamed: and bringing along your mending," said Ethelind.

"I've some mending for the Mite," said Thankful, in a tone of promise.

"If your name had been Agamemnonia, we should have called you Thankye all the same," said Ethelind. "It's all you give a chance for."

"And Midget! If you'll come to see me — *all dressed* — to-morrow morning, at one minute before eight, something pretty will be just ready to happen. It won't happen an instant *after* eight, remember."

I may put in here for brevity, that Thankful unpacked that night a certain small, square box which she had not opened since her arrival; and that she took from it and hung up in her room a beautiful Swiss cuckoo clock, whose striking-weight she only put on in time for the little bird to fly out and chirrup the hour at eight o'clock; and that Madge scarcely ever failed thereafter to present herself in breakfast trim in time to see and hear the lovely wonder which she was never weary of; and that, above all, Aunt Thankye told her that when she should be six years old — if the whole family would vote that she deserved it — she should have the clock for her own, in her own little room. After which, at any threatened escapade or perversity, it needed no more than to say "cuckoo!" to bring the Midget to reason.

Madge's mending turned out to be the re-stringing of a

lovely lot of lava beads of every color — blue, orange, green, black, and white ; deep and pale reds and browns ; soft buffs and grays. Ethel and Celia dropped them through their fingers, and spread them about in the large shallow box in which they were intrusted to Midget, with delight.

“Here is a strong, slim needle, and here a fine silk cord,” said Thankful. “Now, as long as you keep them in the box and on the string, you may work at them, Mite. And you may place the colors as you please.”

Celia had lugged in the stocking-bag, from which, like threads from a snarl, she was wont to draw out and pair as she could, upon emergency, such legs and feet as showed least dilapidation. “If I could only once see to the bottom of this !” she exclaimed. “But, oh, how bewitching !”

The bewitching thing now was a darning-case that Thankful was unrolling. Through stitched slips of silk-lined kid ran smooth cut skeins of cottons and threads, in various colors, as the hosiery of the present day demands. Across the top was a narrow cushion, upon which bristled a bright rank of ready threaded needles, dropping their deep, even fringe in stripes of white, gray, brown and red.

“Use them up for me,” Thankful said to the admiring girls, pinning the pretty furnisher with two thumb-tacks to the window-sill beside them. “I’ve another just now, with only black and gray.

“You see, I always thread a lot of needles all at once ; the chief tiresomeness is the stopping to do that and letting go your stretcher in the middle of a darn. I just stick up one and take down another. What do you use for stretchers ?”

“Eggs. They’re a nuisance. Toadstools are better.”

"Try these egg-cups. Hold by the stems, and darn across the rims."

"What alleviations!" ejaculated Ethelind.

"Oh, that is n't all!" said Thankful. She unfolded a lap-table, set it up, put a book-easel upon it, and on that opened "Lady Betty's Governess."

"We'll have that," she said, "to wile the monotony. With no needles to thread, we can read and darn, both quite smoothly. And here are *these*. Nobody can have more than one after each pair — or repair — which must take at least ten minutes. Mitey, you shall have one after every thirty beads and no spill. Put a black bead every tenth one."

"These" were delicious Huyler's chocolates — simple nonpareils for Mite; the richer *bonnes-bouches* for her elders.

"How utterly Three-jolly-fellowship-porterish!" cried Ethelind again.

The morning sped; darning was "linked sweetness," not seeming long drawn out; Madge strung half her beads, slid down along her cushion, and fell asleep to the pleasant sound of the quaint sentences of the Corbet Chronicle; and by the time it had come to where Margaret Corbet was taken to task by the Lady Jemima, and just as the clock struck eleven, Thankful and Ethelind had finished all of their own work that was at hand.

"Now we might help Celia," suggested Thankful.

"Or go for the oubliette," said Ethelind.

"The *oubliette*?" queried Thankful, astonished.

"Yes. That's the family mending-basket. Mummer *has* to keep things round in funerals."

"Funerals!"

"That was Madge's idea when she first rode by a cemetery and had the white stones explained to her. She

thought it would be a nicer way to 'keep them round in pessorsions.' I think the mending-baskets are a good deal like it."

Celia really saw the bottom of her bag by one o'clock ; there was much brought back to light and usefulness from Mummer's deep "oubliette;" Midget had waked and gone off with a handful of nonpareils to the Middies in their tool-room ; and the Chronicle had got to the ghost story of the Halting Knight in the long armor-gallery.

"Must we really stop ? I shall be miserable till I have more miseries to assuage," said Ethelind.

"You may say 'assuage' !" cried Celia. "It's these *cups* that cheer. Why did n't we invent them when we were cramping our fingers and bending our needles round those wretched eggs ? Oh, dear ! I shall only have three pairs of stockings next Saturday, unless I tear something !"

"We can borrow trouble any time," said Ethel. "There's always this." And she took up the oubliette to carry it away.

"And we can rip up old dresses to make over, and sew all the buttons on all the boots ; and hem dish-towels ; and make rags into holders ; and do all sorts of lovely hateful things," exulted Celia.

"And I have something else to propose — when I have asked your mother," said Thankful.

Mrs. Laura was asked, and reasoned into it ; then Thankful said to the girls, "Would you like to earn the money for the French conversations ?"

She had three summer dresses not made up — purchases of the late season at the marking-down ; two lovely linen lawns, one figured in black with tiny bows and feathered arrows, the other with true-love knots as dainty ; and a pale-gray nun's-veiling like a filmy cloud. These

were to be simply fashioned by an easy pattern ; but they were to have much delicate frilling and side plaiting. Why pay a dressmaker ten dollars each, when here was a pair of deft and ready hands for every one ? There followed delightful sewing hours for weeks, in Thankful's pleasant room ; the conversation class began meantime, and all three joined — "two with their earnings, one with her savings," Thankful said. Home practice came in with the frills and hemmings ; and their readings of charming old-time stories continued. They finished "Lady Betty's Governess," followed it with "Lady Rosamond's Book," and afterwards luxuriated through the inimitable "Old Chelsea Bun-house," and the "Ladies of Bever Hollow."

Four of the seven family wants were met without sacrifice, the other three Thankful had her own thoughts about.

"You can't turn Santa Claus from the house, anyhow!" she declared, in one of her little arguments with Frau Laura.

"I don't know," answered that uncapitulating person ; "if he should come with a packet too big for our chimney."

"He does n't mind an extra up and down ; and where there's a will there's a way, if it's through the roof," said Thankful, walking off with the last word.

But before Christmas several extraordinary things happened ; and all at once, as strange things do.

Miss Salva Peniworth came out from New York, braving the icy ferry-passage, and spent a whole day at Broad-top. To see Thankful, of course, Laura considered ; Thankful had been several times to Thirty-first street, dutifully. Not only so, however : she really and truly liked Aunt Salva ; the real and true of her, which Miss Peniworth hid away from herself. Not merely so, again :

she believed Aunt Salva held herself by great stress from liking Laura; testing her at a length that was exhausting the life-chance for any yielding; and that Laura might have had some kindlier impulse toward Aunt Salva, but that she was so bent on never lowering an eyelash in deference, for fear of the motive that might be imputed.

Between these, Thankful's to-and-fros had to be most nicely measured. Yet they measured themselves, without policy, simply because she could convey no impression that she had not within herself, and her thought and certainty of each was so honestly of the best. This is the true and only mediation.

Aunt Salva held her chin high, and sometimes sniffed, and Laura would keep dignified silence, at any innocently pleasant mentions relatively suggestive of desert or secret appreciation. Laura never gave opening for such, but with Aunt Salva, if Thankful volunteered nothing, there was not wanting some little flick or nudge of query or remark.

"Of course you pay your board, and that must help," Aunt Salva said.

"Five dollars a week. It is all they will touch. They say it costs them no more."

"Humph!" The sound was gruff; but the gray eyes twinkled, and the rough-set wrinkles relaxed.

"She visits on the Round?"

"On the *Brim* — at intervals. She returns civilities — at the front doors. She won't be intimate. The Round is extreme privilege. She does n't go in and out and across, though they have asked her. She says 'thank you,' and takes her own way, all the same."

"Of course they ask her. She is a Peniworth."

"She remembers that; and also that she is Mrs. Stewart Frost."

"Stewart Frost is well enough; but he'll never fire the East River. And I hate frownsiness, and I abominate extravagance, and I despise looking to other people. How is a woman to shape her course?"

"If you were at Broadtop oftener, you would see."

Aunt Salva came to Broadtop. Laura, though she pretended, even to herself, not to care, was glad of her neat, bright entrance-way, neither frowsy nor extravagant, and a debt to no one. People whose harsh counsel or criticism we utterly repel, do nevertheless maintain strange protested power over our self-judgments. Aunt Salva noticed and understood the pretty thrift the minute she set her foot upon it; she was good at expedients herself. But she would not have spoken, to save her best china dinner-service.

That same morning Laura had been anxiously ransacking boxes and drawers for a certain old document presently wanted; it concerned some wild land in Iowa, an inheritance of Stewart Frost's, which the agent wrote might now be sold. One must not buy a pig in a poke, neither should one too readily part with property known only to one's self by hearsay; yet all essentials had better be looked up. The important paper had failed to be found in two preceding searches by Stewart; neither had Laura found it now. It was a worry, and it had put about the regular day's routine. Upon such little conjunctures very particular visits are apt to arrive.

But Laura gathered herself up; she put by the search and the thought of it, since it could not now be continued; she had that gift of self-transference which is a grand thing to possess in this displaced interrupted formation of affairs that we call life; and it was presently quite as if Aunt Salva's visit had been the preconcerted plan and order of the day.

Laura was serenely satisfied with her house ; there was not a new thing in it since Miss Peniworth came there last ; but old things had been so furbished and turned about that it had the aspect of a well-preserved personality ; a little different with time, but nothing really lost, and all kept fresh with a certain adaptiveness which is the secret of growing old with grace, either for furnishings or faces.

The dinner was just as simple as it could be ; but a juicy steak with boiled rice like a snow-heap, and cranberry sauce, done precisely to the jelly turn, and shining from the mould in splendid crimson smoothness, and yellow sweet potatoes such as are fine and cheap in Jersey,—with a delicate squash pie for dessert ; — Aunt Salva could really decline nothing either from lack of relish, or from sublime refusal to enjoy an extravagance.

And Thankful saw to it that the Middies had clean hands ; and Midget was given the rice to help to, which so put her on her dignity that she was sedate even to an elderliness ; and — but with the day's visit itself we have really very little to do.

It was afterward that the thing happened which changed the visit into an event, and the event into all that came of it.

Thankful — who had accompanied Aunt Salva to the station and seen her safely seated in her return train at four-fifteen, on her arrival by which her own carriage was to meet her at Christopher Street, had scarcely reached home again after a stop at the library, and things had but just quieted into evening comfort at the Frosts', when there came up through the town a rush and horror of such news as comes to our tea-tables almost daily from a distance through the papers, but came now through Broadtop by breathless word of mouth, and from within the very com-

pass of the "view" from the Brim windows. It was such a very different thing.

It ran along the streets of the plain, making pale faces as it went, and up the Slope, from dwelling to dwelling, to the exempt and separate Round itself, that might not ordinarily be so much as touched by little lower, local ferments.

That four-fifteen train had come to grief, a mile above, at Southdale Junction. A mishandled switch — a few freight-cars on a siding — a run-off upon it; one car jammed up and splintered to pieces — three or four thrown off against a walled embankment.

Three persons killed, many grievously or fatally hurt. The Broadtop passengers, mostly in the last, least injured car, were sent back to their homes. Other sufferers were following, Broadtop being the nearest refuge. Aunt Salva, in less than two hours from her leave-taking, was carried in again at the little olive-colored house on the Slope, with a fractured leg, and a ragged flesh wound from some end of broken iron.

That same night — so things followed — Stewart Frost came down from New York to meet this dreadful surprise, heart-laden with serious ill news of his own. A Boston man's failure had been announced; large, scattered liabilities — assets nearly nothing; and Stewart had held a note of his, had got it discounted, and of course indorsed it himself. It was for twenty-five hundred dollars, payable at the North National Bank in Boston on the twenty-third of the current month.

Here were real heavy pain and trouble. Laura's bonds must go now; and though the western land should be sold, she could not buy them back again, with their seven per cent. interest that had always paid the rent of the home. Aunt Salva in the house too, at the very climax;

helpless, obliged to be obliged to them ; that making it all the more impossible for proud, help-scorning Laura to let her know their strait. Laura and her husband would go on caring for the old lady in hers, though it were with the last dollar, and never let her dream the fact ; they would do it with a stiff, cool quietness, lest warmth or kindness should be suspected of hope or satisfaction in the opportunity ; and Miss Peniworth would take them at their self-presentation, and chafe at every spoonful of broth or gruel, and squirm in her bed at every footstep up and down in her service.

Why would not people understand each other ? And why must everything happen in a heap ?

Bits and edges ? But here was the whole loaf !

III.

THE WHOLE LOAF.

"THERE are two blue boxes in the high wardrobe, Thankye," said Mrs. Laura — "lint and bandages ; an inheritance from the war."

Thankful went to look for them, and brought back a box of lint and a bundle of yellow papers. "Blue Bluff Lands, Iowa," was written on the wrapper. "They were in the bandage-box," she said.

In twenty years, things supposed all the while untouched may easily by some chance have happened to be shifted. "The strips got used probably," said Laura, "and then these were put there."

"Wasn't it just a Providence ?" she exclaimed to Stewart, when she gave him the lost documents. Stewart drew up his eyebrows.

"Funny notions you women have of Providence," he

said. "An old woman's leg broken — to say nothing of all the rest of the maiming and murdering — to bring one old deed to light out of a lint box."

"I never said it!" cried Frau Laura indignantly. "But I *do* say that while anybody is about it, all sorts of things are done by the way; and that's the reason, perhaps, that it takes a woman to see a Providence."

"For all that, dearie, I'm afraid this particular arrangement is too late for the twenty-third."

"As if Providence wasn't arranging at both ends!" retorted Laura, whose little sermons were always of the free-spoken, epigrammatic soft. "We'll do our best, and — the Lord will do his best!" And with that word the earnest tears stood in her eyes. Stewart kissed her, and a touch of her faith passed into his heart, more live, perhaps, than if she had preached more solemnly.

Miss Salva sent for Miss Sluyterhand, the companion housekeeper. This pacified her sense of undue obligation somewhat; she could pay Miss Sluyterhand's board, and put aside those irksome services of her kin. But it made no one else more comfortable. The waiting on Miss Sluyterhand by no means passed into the acknowledged account; and that personage herself inwardly resented the overthrow of certain little private plans and calculations. The letter was already written which was to summon her sister and niece to visit her in New York; the cook and the butler had had friendly hints of a possible little vacation in their turn — for these three were of the wise in their generation in the making of friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; and now to be boxed up here to nurse Miss Peniworth, "amongst forty children and a girl of all work!" it was a choking exasperation. Miss Peniworth knew very well what her dependant's services were worth; that was why she employed them. She would

have no heart thrown in that could not be reckoned and paid for; she would have "no mixing up with her own." Well, she had maintained her principle so far, but now some other power and plan had interfered. And as Mrs. Laura said, Providence does many things by the way.

Miss Salva often snubbed Miss Sluyterhand. That also was tacitly in the bargain.

"You may go to walk, or to bed," she said to her one afternoon. "I'll have some of the children in. I sha'n't want my tonic and jelly till six o'clock, and I want to be amused."

Certainly Miss Sluyterhand was not amusing. But it did not divert her to be told so, or to be contrasted disparagingly with Bobby Frost, who presently came in, as to the presence of Old King Cole, with pipe and bowl, which it had occurred to him might please Miss Peniworth.

"You see," he said to that groaned-up lady, whom now that she was literally groaned-up, he commiserated — "you see, all these bubbles that stay round on the drug-get" — and he dropped another shining sphere, to Aunt Salva's real wonderment, among the rolling, glittering crowd — "are good things you go and do." He was reproducing a certain little lesson Aunt Thankful had read to him, but Miss Peniworth could only guess at that. "The water is just the pothsibility. There has to be something that makes the water stick together tight. That's when you say 'I will,' real strong; put glytheerine in it. And then you blow;" Bobby stopped to illustrate with a green and golden ball; "that's the breather-life in it. And then" — he rolled the beautiful thing down before him, all throbbing with splendid hues — "the Lord puts the colors in, and makes it thshine!"

"Where did you get that, and who told you to tell me?" demanded Miss Salva from her pillow.

Bobby looked up with eyes as pure and shining with sweet color as his globes.

"Why, Aunt Thankye! She knows lots. And nobody told me. It is n't a methsizhe." But presently Bobby took himself off, very much as if he had discharged his errand, and left Aunt Salva with the bubbles shining on the floor, and the "message" turning over in some wonderful new light within her mind.

Somehow, from pure pity, certainly from no instigation, the youthful life of the house gathered around that bed of imprisonment, and poured its best out for its soothing.

Ethelind read excellently; Aunt Salva discovered it from her rendering to her, at request, the columns of the "New York Times." Afterward, as magnanimously suffering a kindness, the old lady had said, "You might bring a book, if you like." And Ethelind brought her favorite "Lady Betty" and "Lady Rosamond."

"Are n't you afraid of the Lady Jemima and Sister Catherine parts?" asked Celia, outside the door one morning.

"Why, no! Aunt Salva is n't a 'religious'!"

"She preaches, though, and regulates. And she's got a creed, a stiff one. 'A Peniworth is a Peniworth.' There's all sorts; any kind of *oughty* is piousness; and she's very *oughty*."

"Any kind of naughty is wickedness; and you're very naughty," said Ethel with grim gravity. There was a touch of Peniworth uncompromisingness about herself that owned kindred with Aunt Salva.

It was Celia's proposition, however, on the Saturday, that the "three jolly fellowships" should "sympose" in Aunt Salva's room. So they came, Madge and Oddy-doddy linked on as usual, the former with big ivory crochet-needle and rug-yarn, to which she had been pro-

moted, and Ethel fetching the dear old "Neighbors;" for they were just discovering Miss Bremer and her Swedeland home pictures out of their forty years' antiquity; Miss Peniworth had never read them in her day, simply because all the world went so ridiculously wild over them.

"We're coming down upon you," said Ethelind; "book, bags, basket, bonbons, oubliette, and all."

"And Oddy-doddy," quoth Madge. "But you need to be complete, you know."

"What?" demanded the old lady with the broken leg.

"Oh, only to be sorry; and to bring your mending," quoted the child in explanation, delivering a whole gospel unawares. And Aunt Salva's great gray eyes followed her and Oddy-doddy round the room in stern amaze.

Mrs. Laura looked vexed when she entered later with the invalid's claret and biscuits. "I thought you knew better!" she said to Thankful. She was sure it would seem to Aunt Salva like a premeditated show. But Aunt Salva could see through things, both ways.

"You need n't worry!" she said sharply to Laura. "You're no goose, nor yet ostrich. I should n't suspect *you* of eggs laid on top of the sand."

These two women shot very straight at one another, without even training their guns.

As Christmas drew nearer, the Middies, and Bobby, and Madge were strangely perplexed at the hushings-up they got. It seemed as if Christmas were suddenly an unutterable "bad word," and Santa Claus a disreputable person not to be alluded to. They had always had their blessed little transparent mysteries, but the mysteries were never before forbidden to be talked about; indeed, the all-but tellings, and the elaborate hints, had heretofore

been the most delightfully exciting part of it. Bobby and Madge would whisper and consult in spite of hushings, on their favorite confidential landing just outside the spare chamber-door.

"Perhaps she won't hang up her stocking at all," said Bobby. "If she does, I shall put in a pipe and a bottle. They don't cothst muthsh."

"I'd give her my Oddy-doddy," said Madge, "only she's such a scratch-cat to people she don't know and that don't know her."

"I should n't think a *Chrithshmas* thing would scrathsh anybody," said Bobby.

"I guess you're thinking of *Christian* things; and cats ain't Christian, not even in stockings," said Madge reflectively, her peculiarly clear pronunciation contrasting with Bobby's crushed digraphs.

"Hang up my stocking!" the old lady was muttering, as she overheard them. "I guess if I do it'll only be because there's no leg to put into it!" But she fell to thinking of Christmas and "Christian things" in an unwonted manner, for all that. A little later, as she lay silent, a queer, half-conscious smile played curiously among the wrinkles that seemed to ripple in it across the pale old face.

"It *might* scratch," she whispered. "People that she don't know, and that don't know her."

The Midget's word came like a refrain to her ear, and a moral to her meditation. It was very near to "people that she ought to know, and that ought to know her."

Miss Peniworth lay there, I think, from day to day, picking up the crumbs that fell from the children's table, growing a little sorry, and doing some mending besides the bone-mending that she had "brought with her." In a way, therefore, to be more "complete" by Christmas time.

Mrs. Laura came into her room one morning, and spoke without preface.

"If you would n't mind, Aunt Salva," she said, "I should much prefer to be without Miss Sluyterhand. She requires more consideration, and makes more difference in the house than you do."

"All right," returned Aunt Salva. "Plainest said is readiest read. Short metre's easy singing." And instead of being annoyed, she actually looked with respect at Madam Laura. Miss Sluyterhand was astounded within half an hour at being told that she might return by next train to Thirty-first street. "It don't take six sound women to look after one smashed one," said Miss Peniworth.

"You might have counted them up before," returned the companion.

"Did n't know they all counted, but they do," replied Miss Peniworth.

"If she begins to realize her relations!" — said Miss Sluyterhand to herself, and felt herself already counted out, and that the next order might be back to Pekeansneke village where she came from.

And Christmas drew nearer and nearer; and the twenty-third must come before the twenty-fifth; and the papers closing the land sale had only been signed and sent to Blue Bluff by the mail of the thirteenth, and there was but just a chance of payment coming by the twenty-second, when Stewart Frost must go to Boston.

"We won't sell your bonds, Laura," he said to his wife, "but I'm afraid they must be hypothecated; and I don't like to lay a finger on them. The Iowa money won't quite cover, you see; and then so many things might happen to absorb some of it before redeeming the other. I don't like it," he repeated slowly and strongly. And

Laura knew well that there were other tight pinches, and that once in pledge she might easily have seen the last of her nice little seven per cents.

The mails of the twenty-first brought nothing, either to the New York or Broadtop address, from Blue Bluff. The morning of the twenty-second broke clear and sharp, with its tardy sunrise and a wind that streamed straight from northern icebergs. Stewart Frost was to go by the Fall River boat that night; he left home with his wife's bonds, duly transferred to himself, in his breast-pocket.

"I will telegraph you if anything comes to Leonard street," he said, when he bade Laura good-bye. "Coast down hill after me, Bobby, and report to mamma from morning mail."

"Something might come here by the quarter-past two," said Laura.

"No use," said Stewart. "Afternoon mail would be gone, and night mail from here would n't overtake. I shall be busy early to-morrow. You can't borrow money in a minute, even on L. L. and T's." And so he went away, leaving neither address nor instruction for anything to follow.

Nevertheless, Bobby coasted downhill again to the post-office at half-past two o'clock, the women watching for his return from an upper window.

"There he comes — with his 'wrethshedness,'" said Thankful, spying the small figure first, tugging his sled with one hand, and flourishing the other in the air, square white corners showing from it above the grasp of the red mitten.

"And now, what? He said it was no use."

"But it must be. It has got to be. I'll go to New York."

"Then, what? And there's no train till four-fifteen."

"Then I'll catch him at the boat. And there's a train from Southdale at three-fifteen."

"You can't catch that."

"I can. Win Trupeare will drive me over." And Thankful turned to a writing-table behind her and began to scratch off one of her little double-and-twisted notes.

"Thanky!"

"All right, quite welcome!"

"Pshaw! Nonsense, I mean! You must n't. Thermometer down to two below, and going to tumble all night."

"We shall too, and so will Stewart — if this letter does n't go."

"This letter has n't come." But it did come in at that minute.

"Will you go over to the Trupeare's with this, my Scandinavian?"

Bobby received the unknown term and the pat on the shoulder as if they had been knighthood and the accolade.

"'Course I will." And with a snuffle and a rub of the mitten across eyes watery with the cold, he took the paper quirl and stumped off once more.

"I can't!" exclaimed Laura.

"I know it, so it is to be I," responded Thankful, pulling wraps out of the wardrobe.

"Let you!" finished Laura.

"Nor hinder."

And now Thankful's arctic boots were on and the button-hook flashing along their fastenings.

"You'll never find him in that crowd. You'll barely be on time."

"I'll have half an hour. I'll send a policeman on board and I'll watch the gangway."

"It will be pitch-dark, and no train home between five and seven. You'll freeze."

"No matter. I won't. Besides, there's always Thirty-first street, and Miss Sluyterhand." But on the way to Southdale, Thankful had time to consider that she would by no means try Thirty-first street. She knew the "tricks and the manners" there; and she would neither use the servants' hospitality behind their mistress' back — and Aunt Salva must not know — nor go up town for the chance of being locked out and still further belated. "But Providence is at both ends, and at all crossings," she said to herself. She was persuaded that Providence had this matter in hand, and as one link had put this letter into hers.

"Thanks, ever so much. Don't stop," she said to Win, jumping out on the platform at Southdale. And as Win had to meet his father by the three-thirty arrival at Broad-top, he bade "Good-bye," then sprung to his seat, grabbed his fur cap in salute, and shot away on swift runners over the sharp, crusted snow.

Left alone, Thankful realized some eeriness in this thing she had set about. The midwinter sun was low down already. And the train — from far up country — did not come to the junction till quite fifteen minutes behind time.

"I shall have fifteen minutes," she said to herself; but in a mental tone as if already, she began to say, "Don't be a goose, Thankful!"

Three minutes lost again at a turn-out, through being off time. "Twelve minutes!" Thankful told herself. "I wonder if I am a goose?"

On board the ferry-boat she sat under a lamp, watch in hand, and came solemnly to the conclusion that she was a goose — a wild one — and on a hopeless chase.

Ice at the starting-slip, ice hindering the paddles that crushed their slow way across, ice at the landing in big, loose blocks, delaying the chaining up. Only five minutes left her when she hurried up the sideway, and out into the stream and whirlpool of teams and jostling people.

"I can at least jump on board and go with him!" she thought desperately. "If only I can run over or through this crowd that has no business!" One always does feel irrationally, that the rest of the crowd is intrusively superfluous.

She made the two squares' distance somehow; slipping, stumbling, bewildered by lights and darkness, she hurried down another sideway, ominously clear of passers.

Arrived at the open landing-doors, behold the gang-plank just flung aside — a void beyond, with water heaving and plashing against the pier, not yet stilled from the outgoing of the steamer. The *Providence* — was it a sarcasm? gone on its way, leaving her and her errand in the lurch!

One feels at such a time as if the world had slipped from underfoot, taking away all purpose and connection one had with it. For an instant, Thankful stood, stunned, still; then every faculty in her sprang up keen and swift to the emergency.

"There's another way to Boston, yet!" she said, as if Boston had been at best a distance of minutes, and it were but a question of street-car or steam. "And it's so good that Laura will settle me in her mind at Thirty-first street! Nobody to worry; nobody to know. The train is in at the Albany an hour, sometimes, before the other from Fall River; I'll just go!"

And she walked up Barclay street the loneliest, bravest little woman afoot there or perhaps in all New York.

Up town by the Elevated Road. Now there would only

be that stretch of Forty-second street to the Grand Central. Yet "nobody to know" repeated itself with a thrill of something that could just feel like — if it were not — fear, as the car whirled on between the upper stories that gave glimpses of all sorts of homes to her who was out of home to-night! As the passengers stamped in and out, shrugging themselves with cold, she felt drearily how she had isolated herself, effaced her trail. Nobody to speak to; nobody to know anything of her. Would anybody find out what had become of her, should accident or illness befall her? Her head was giddy with the painful bracing of the cold, and the rush of excited thought.

Still she did not waver from her resolve. It would be cheerful in the great station; there would be plenty of people — ladies among them — going to Boston in the train. Boston-ward was homeward. She should be among familiar things in the morning; she should find Stewart; then he would take care. She should return so cosily with him. He would have had his money with him — his own — that was buttoned safe in the breast of her jacket, and would never have touched that little portion of his wife's. How glad his pride would be! Oh, yes, she would keep on!

Along Forty-second street, in what seemed like night-time, though she knew it was not yet six o'clock. There was a train at nine, she thought. Three hours to wait; that was the hardest. And how bitter the night was growing!

Arrived at the station, she went to the time-table. No train till half-past nine, and that — she glanced down the column — only to Springfield! The puttings off were like a nightmare! She looked again. A train at ten. That was the Shore Line. It would not do; it would take her in at the Providence station. How "Provi-

dence" seemed to mock her all along! Yet she said to herself bravely and faithfully, "There's a plan across all crosses. I must just keep on."

The through train by Springfield would leave at ten-thirty. *Four* hours, and more! She would spend half the weary night before she could be on her way. All this time to be thinking whether or not it were a wild-goose chase — a burning of the candle for a game not vitally enough worth while. If she had known all beforehand, she might not have begun. But it had been meant she should begin!

She went to the office for "sleeper" tickets. A kind-looking, fatherly old German occupied the bureau. "I should like a whole section," she said to him. "I am suddenly obliged to go alone."

"So!" he said, looking gently — earnestly at her above his glasses. "Very vell; here it ees. Number ten; lower berth was taken, but I shall put him in t'irteen. Can I do more for you any vay?"

"Unless you can manage neighbors for me," answered Thankful, smiling gratefully. "I wish I were sure of ladies near."

"See!" said the ticket-seller, with still warming friendliness, "here in eleven will be an old zhentleman and ees vife; nice people, I know dhem. And in number twelve — ah, number twelve is not engage. It will have to be very crowded before I gif number twelve vidhout I chose the people for you, young lady. I hef my own daughters — see?"

Thankful had put some biscuits in her bag, in case of detention. She sat down to eat them now, and found also a little paper of chocolates, bought in her shopping two days before. She comforted herself with these, and tried to feel composed, like a traveler on a planned, pro-

vided journey. She would buy her ticket later among regular comers. But people looked almost cruel to her, passing to and fro in safe and happy escort ; and the long clock-hand crept so unwillingly round the great dial that seemed made to measure magnified hours.

Half-past six ; a long up-grade to seven ; down to the half-hour again. *Did* it climb slower than it fell ? Two more whole rounds after eight ; then, perhaps, the train would be ready.

Twenty minutes to eight — suddenly she stood up, made one step forward. “ Oh ! ”

The sound slightly arrested the movement of a person who had just entered ; a tall, high-bred looking man. He looked round, and turned toward her. “ Miss Holme ! ” he said, surprised.

“ Oh, Mr. Shatoraine ! ” And then something came over her that drew her back and up, in a proud, shy, receding way. “ I beg pardon,” she said, very quietly.

“ But why ? Is there anything — you have just arrived, perhaps ? Is there anything that I can do ? ”

“ Oh, no, indeed. I spoke without thinking. I have been waiting so long, and there was nobody I ever saw before, till you came in. I was getting nervous, that was all.”

“ Waiting ? My dear Miss Holme, what is it ? Have you missed any one ? Are you all alone ? ”

“ Yes. But — oh, it is all right ! I was too late to meet my brother-in-law at the boat ; and now I am only going by the Springfield train myself to catch him in the morning.” It seemed all at once quite simple again, and as if she were restored to her place in the line of human relation and event, since she had found a face and voice she knew. “ It is really nothing ; only — I never was quite so nearly astray before, and the time seemed so long ! ”

"Going! By the night train!" Mr. Shatoraine looked but half comprehending, and wholly astonished.

"It may seem very strange to you," said Thankful, with that receding air again. "But it is an errand. Most strangeness is the not understanding people's errands, I suppose."

This time Mr. Shatoraine begged pardon.

"I have some papers for him from home; I came in from Broadtop with them, and the boat had just gone; we had no address, and he would not look for them by mail; there's no other way — and there is this; so it can't be really *out* of the way!" And Thankful smiled in a bright, sure, true fashion.

"Of course — not that," said Mr. Shatoraine hastily. He spoke to the smile and the sweet, brave intent, though, rather than to the fact. "I mean, there's no reason; but — the night will be tremendous. Is it only the papers?" he asked with a sudden inspiration. "I'm going myself, if you would trust me with them." In order of phrasing, he spoke straight truth. "I'm to meet my mother directly in the train from New Haven. I must see her home; but if you would just tell me at once — we shall have ten minutes; *can't* I do your errand for you?"

Everything flashed together through Thankful's head.

Mrs. Shatoraine, proud, punctilious woman, how strange all this would look to her, whose non-understanding last year of a little strangeness had been the suspending of a pleasant intimacy for Thankful, and had pulled the muscles of her own pride now, in meeting with the lady's son! She would not have Mrs. Shatoraine lifting her eyebrows at her again and asking no explanation. And if she were released from this journey that had grown terrible to her? Thirty-first street? Miss Sluyterhand might be at Pekeansneke: cook and butler anywhere. Anyhow, it was hateful.

Ferry for Broadtop train at eight-thirty. Possible, certainly; but the great seething city to cross; the dark places near the piers; the icy river, even the five minutes' walk at Broadtop from a ten-o'clock arrival. Yet, oh, if she *could* get home!

Her eye fell on a messenger boy, a bright, capable, honest-faced lad of fifteen, just reporting himself at the office.

"I wonder if I could send myself home like a parcel?" she thought suddenly.

"*Would* you?" she asked of Raynald Shatoraine, with depths of thanks and obligation in the question.

"Most certainly, gladly and easily. Your brother-in-law" —

"Mr. Stewart Frost. You know him?"

"Oh yes. He arrives by steamboat train? And these papers?"

"Are important to him to-morrow. There will be at least a half-hour between the two arrivals, likely more."

"And if we two men both reach Boston, they shall be put into his hands as he leaves the cars. You could do no more yourself. Depend upon me."

Thankful unclasped her sealskin jacket, and drew from its inner pocket the Blue Bluff letter. "Only that," she said. "But it will make a great difference to him."

"I can suppose so, since you would have undertaken such an errand." And Raynald Shatoraine looked upon Thankful's proud, shy, tremulous face, and measured in his mind the courage and the kindness that must dwell together with what he saw there, to have sent her with this charge to-night.

"I did n't undertake it altogether; it grew upon me; and grew rather grewsome at the last," she said, with the tone relief makes laughing, out of almost tears.

"But now? How will you do?" Things began to rush all at once through Raynald Shatoraine's head. Could she wait? Would his mother wait? How could he see her on her way home? And—he also shrunk from that—what would his mother say, or think, until it all could be told as it deserved to be?

"I will send myself home by a messenger boy!" said Thankful; and she walked straight over to the office with the word. Mr. Shatoraine stood by, a little apart, to see what would come of it, and to judge for her; to protect, if need be.

"Can you send a messenger with a *person*, sir?" asked Thankful of the chief.

"Oh yes; do it quite often. People miss their friends, or get left; can send you safely anywhere."

"But it is out of town; I am going to Broadtop; I must take the ferry at eight-thirty for the train—an hour from the Jersey station. And I must have an escort all the way home. There is a signal-train back through Broadtop at ten-ten. There would be time for the messenger to take that."

"All right." The officer turned to his tables. "Two dollars and forty cents. You pay your fares, he pays his; charge includes all. You take a certificate of delivery, and sign when you reach home." With that he rapidly made it out, calling at the same time to the handsome, honest-faced boy in buttons.

"Stephen!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You take this young lady—elevated road to Barclay Street Ferry—train to Broadtop; see her home; come back by ten-ten signal-train; report here before twelve."

"All right, sir."

Mr. Shatoraine could scarcely consider, much less ex-

postulate ; it was all wonderful ; unusual, but seemingly as sure as telegraphing. He must meet his mother ; Thankful must hasten on her way. She held out her hand to him, said " I thank you," — three syllables in which the pronoun put intensification far beyond the meaning of the ordinary two, to say nothing, as it deserves, of that merest toss-off, the modern monosyllable ; then she added hurriedly, " Oh, here is this ! " and transferred to him a paper slip which he did not look at till afterward ; and without further word was gone.

The slip was her ticket for section number ten.

Mr. Raynald Shatoraine found himself accompanied in the long railway journey afterward with many freshened and strengthened ideas.

" Quick, thorough, ready, true, brave ; full of service ! That makes a woman indeed ! " was a kind of refrain to his leisurely recollection of swift details. And on the return trip, next night, with Stewart Frost for companion, there were not wanting more details naturally drawn forth ; nor more refrain, naturally, though silently repeating and augmenting itself.

I must finish my crusts with three crisp scraps.

There were no delays in Thankful's homeward trip, beyond the few minutes of the slower ferry passage. She presented herself with Stephen Buttons at the door, just as Mrs. Laura was peering forth anxiously, before locking up. She signed the delivery ticket, gave Stephen a handsome Christmas gratuity, and bade him good-night with great kindness. The interest she had formed for him by the way might begin another little story ; and did, though it remain here untold.

The adventure was too fine to be kept quite quiet, in that household. It came to Aunt Salva's ears, alert, and

flexible like a cat's. Stewart's arrival on Christmas Eve put an end to whatever little ambiguities had been fenced with before. A man never keeps anything to himself, which is why women have more secrets intrusted to them than they can keep.

"Well, we're both *home*, and I'm *thankful*!" was his blurting out of gratitude and all. Another man-fashion. The grip of his fingers over his young sister-in-law's said more. And then came questions, answers, a full recount.

"But how did you dare? With the crowds in the streets — oh, Aunt Thankye!"

"The crowd was the comfort. So many of them were Christmas people. It was the safest time in the whole year."

"And Providence *was* at both ends; and in the middle, at the Grand Central!" confessed Stewart, with mischief and earnest mixed.

On Christmas morning — (scrap number two) — the stocking-jollity being kept as hushed as possible — there came an unexpected early summons from Aunt Salva. She wanted "Laura and the girls." Thankful included herself, unchallenged.

"It's a good day to settle things," said Aunt Salva, bolstered well up in bed, and looking dignified. "I've been here, Laura, three weeks, and there will be three more. There's my board and lodging." And she put a package into Mrs. Laura's hand. That lady looked astonished and apprehensive.

"I think I must open it before I accept," she said; and Aunt Salva smiled grimly.

Laura unfastened a thick envelope, tied with pink tape. She drew forth six familiar-looking folded sheets inscribed in pairs, each two with a like name: "Laura Peniworth

Frost," "Ethelind Holme Frost," "Celia Charlotte Frost." Each sheet a "Liberty Loan and Trust" bond for one thousand dollars.

"Aunt Salva, this is — insufferable!" But the paused-for word came forth with a most contradictory tremble.

"You can't help it — Christmas Day!" shouted Aunt Salva. "And now, hear. I always speak the truth right out — when I see it — to myself, or another. My tongue's as rough inside my mouth as at the tip. I've been a fool. I've been twenty years finding out that you was n't, Laura Peniworth. You were right about the spider, and the crusts, Thankful Holme. And you've buttered the biggest one in the basket, and that's me. Laura Peniworth, do as you'd be done by; heap coals of fire!"

But if there were any fieriness or coals coming, there were clear, soft drops in Aunt Salva's splendid old gray eyes, ready to put them out.

"Mother," said Raynald Shatoraine, four weeks later — (and this is scrap number three), — "Miss Holme is at Miss Salva Peniworth's; won't you call?"

Mr. Shatoraine had decided, during that night trip to Boston, to withhold somewhat indefinitely its explanation from his mother. But now he felt like bringing it about, with proper preface.

"Why should I, my dear? Our acquaintance had dropped, I thought."

"You ought to pick it up again, as if you had dropped a diamond. You have mistaken Thankful Holme."

"Not her *ignorance*, Raynald, if it were not rudeness, or worse. A lady could n't be ignorant like that."

"To ask you to excuse her from her engagement, because her grandmother could not spare her, after all?"

"When I sat in the carriage at the door, and she with

hat and gloves on, at the last moment! and then that she should appear later, with those Heyripps! And her manner with Arthur Sturgeon! And his driving her home! You can't explain it, Raynald."

"No. But she could. You never asked her. She is as proud as you."

"I am much the older."

"And can so be the more gracious."

"It is too slight a matter, and was so long ago. Why do you care?"

"When you are satisfied, I will tell you."

Mrs. Shatoraine did call in Thirty-first street. Thankful was a little high and straight with her. But the gracious lady took her way, now, with a true queenship.

"My dear, can you remember a small thing a long while?"

"Some small things, Mrs. Shatoraine."

"Why did you throw me over in our engagement for the Hering's garden party, when I was in Norchester, summer before last?"

"It was grandmamma. One of her nerve attacks."

"Why did you come afterward with the Miss Heyripps?"

"They came for me, and said that the Sturgeons had got back, and would be there, and I must come," answered Thankful sweetly, with gentle malice.

"Ah!"

"And then grandmamma would have it," continued Thankful, still sweetly, without the malice. "She was very anxious to hear from Mr. Arthur Sturgeon; the banker, you know."

"I know."

"She was worried about her O. P. and Q. stocks."

"And he returned with you?"

"Yes ; to see grandmamma. I only stayed long enough to do my errand."

"I see. And people cannot always quite see through the errands of other people." Which was precisely what Thankful had told Raynald Shatoraine.

Mrs. Shatoraine kissed her, begged her to forgive an old woman's touchy stupidity, and to come, in token, for a day in Gramercy Park."

Meanwhile, being "satisfied," she heard the rest from Raynald.

"She is a whole pearl, unset," said Mrs. Shatoraine.

When Thankful went back to Broadtop, Raynald Shatoraine went with her and dined at the Frosts'.

"There's one thing," said Stewart, that evening, when the other had gone. "I hope you don't mean to be done with *us*, sister-in-law? You're welcome to my last crust, I'm sure!"

"For the buttering, — crafty man!" put in his frau.

"Why not, blessed woman? It's the woman-blessedness. Wherever she is, there'll always be a *thankful home*, at any rate!"

"Yes. And there could n't be more, even though she should be a — castle-queen!"

Which remote allusion I leave for girl-readers to apply and translate.

THE SOAP-BUBBLE QUESTION.

TWO OPEN LETTERS.¹

LETTER I.

PINE POND, *December 1, 1883.*

MY DEAR AND VERITABLE THANKFUL HOLME :—
Although I cannot claim your actual personal acquaintance—having only held telephonic communication with you when listening (as a reporter) for the transmissions from Innerland—I am venturing upon this direct appeal in the confidence that one whom I have so closely approached with a sympathy that has almost made us for the time identical may suffer the liberty graciously, and give me, if possible, some response. I do not even know precisely how to address you; as since I last hailed and heard from you over the Innerland lines, it may easily have happened that you should have changed both abiding and name; but I risk this through the official centre, trusting that its call may find you by some tingle of the wire not yet loosened or cast off, which holds between the utterance of you there received, and your substantial somewhere-ness, which I doubt not.

Will that do for regulation preamble, and may I rush at once, now, to my purpose? The fact is, dear Thankful, I am in a scrape through you. I find myself involved in a kind of "Hatchet" game, if you know what that is, and obliged to turn to you for an answer to pass on.

"I have a hatchet."

¹ Printed in "Wide Awake," in response, as apparent, to many "notes and queries," elicited by "Buttered Crusts."

"What?"

"A hatchet."

"Hatchet." "What?" "What?" "Hatchet,"
"HATCHET!"

"HATCHET!" "What?" "What?" "WHAT?"
"Hatchet," "Hatchet," "HATCHET," "HATCHET!"

And so on, down and up the line, with the followings of: "Where did you get it?" "'d you get it?" — "you get it?" — "Did you buy it? buy it? buy it? *steal* it? *steal* it?" and the confusions and repetitions of "Hatchet." "D'd ye buy it? *steal* it? SL-h! *Hatchet!*" mingling and echoing like haunting cries and whispers of some mocking taunt and imputation. With me it is "Bubble!" "*Bubble!*" "D'd y' make it?" "D'd y' see it?" "D'd y' MIX it?" — "What was it?" "'t was it?" "WAS it?" "Bubble." "*Bubble!*" "Sh-h!" "Psha!" "'T was n't!"

I feel indeed to have sought the bubble reputation, or risked it, as in the cannon's mouth, or over dynamite. To have started a bubble speculation, blown of air — and watered stock — to tempt confiding people to their disappointment and demolition. On all sides the demand comes back to me — "What was it?" "How do you make it?" "Will you tell me by return mail?" "Soap-bubbles: Buttered Crusts: Want some!" WIDE AWAKE: "Recipe" — "recipe" — "*Recipe!*"

Even the unhappy editor is implored of; and the WISE BLACKBIRD a-perch behind the editor's shoulder. It is a fresh case of

Old King Cole, —
The jolly old soul, —
(And a jolly old soul was he)
Who called for his pipe
And called for his bowl,
And called for his fiddlers three.

While, as in the picture in *Baby's Opera*, the pipe and the bowl and the fiddlers are come, and they wait for their orders then and there; but the little gray owl sits solemn and dumb, and blinks from the back of his Majesty's chair.

They know nothing about it; so they turn upon me; and I have no recourse but to pass the query back and up to you, through the looking-glass, or what way soever you and your bubbles may indeed be got at.

I have not come to you until I have tried to do my best without you. Of course I could not get truly pipes and truly soap-suds through that shadowy transmitter; I arrived at no practical knowledge; I could only tell again what I supposed myself to have heard accurately. Maybe there was some mistake running wild along the wires. Or some cross-contact mixing up exclamations over, say, a sky-glow, a stained-glass window, a new set of finger-bowls, iridescent or of crackled sunshine — with those at the Broadtop supper-table.

I was sure of two things, anyhow: of that newspaper paragraph — which indeed was the only ingredient I had to begin with — and of a lovely experiment I had seen with my own eyes years ago, shown by the late Professor William B. Rogers in a friend's parlor; where he blew a bubble which he rested in a little silver frame and set up before us, that we might watch the coming and changing and vanishing of the crimson and golden and violet hues, according to the fixed and mighty laws that rule the rushing splendors of the comet, or lend their tender touch to the thinning out of faint, impalpable light-waves spelling the prism alphabet upon a little globe of watery film.

I knew I was right about that; that it stayed, and stayed, and turned from flame-color to amber-yellow, and to green and blue and purple; trailed over at last with a

flickering breath of palest violet like the mere whisper of a tint! That we *almost* handled it, as we gathered about it, and pointed out its wonders to each other, and asked our teacher what it was made of *besides* light! And I know he told us that he had put glycerine into the mixture.

So, when that item came to my eyes about "London bubble parties" — "oleate of soda" — (you *know* I did n't tell a bit more than was told me, and that I discreetly sent *you* to a chemist, and left the matter between you and him, with the facilities you have in Innerland), I felt quite authorized (and that is not a pun) to put my equal part of imagination to my fact of newspaper scrap, add all that you whispered to me, and leave the pleasure of investigation to those who should "take stock" in my story.

Only, as I have told you, I was not to be let off so. On the contrary, I was to be lettered. The mails began to bring me catechetical inquiries; in short, to bring me to book. I was either to grovel down and "'fess," like Topsy, or to rise like Truthful James and explain.

And see how helpless I was! Up here at Pine Pond how I was to catch a chemist? I did n't even have a pipe.

In the palpitation of dismay upon receiving that first politely worded —

"If not too much trouble, dear Mrs. Whitelie, would you please send me the exact proportions, etc.," — which threw my innocent story-teller's license in my face with the look of a humbug, I rushed away half a mile in the wind's eye, to a small grocery, and bought half a dozen clay pipes; thence straight out, the length of the village, to the drug shop, hard by the desolate, sandy cemetery, and asked the man if he knew of such a thing as "oleate of soda." Of course he did n't; I began to doubt if any-

body did. But he said he was going to Old Knick — the city, I mean, — in a day or two, and he would inquire. Meantime, I rushed home again, bound to try something. My credit was at stake. My draft — upon the Public Confidence Bank — had come home protested — “no effects.” I knew they had been trying, and had n’t got any.

I hoisted up Webster’s Unabridged from the floor in the window corner, where I had established my Shaker chair with the Lexicon for a footstool ; looked up “oleate,” and received the information that it was “a compound of oleic acid with a salifiable base. Then I dragged down an encyclopædia — Chambers, vol. vii., N U M to P U E — and searched out “oleic acid.”

“Colorless, limpid fluid ” — “solidifies into firm, white crystalline mass ” — “constituent of oleine ” — “exists in most of the fats ” — “difficult to obtain in purity ” — “forms neutral and acid salts ” — “only compounds requiring notice are normal salts of the alkalies ” — “all soluble, and by the evaporation of their aqueous solution, form — *soaps* ! ”

“Oleate of potash forms a soft soap, chief ingredient in Naples soap ; oleate of soda forms hard soap — enters largely into composition of Marseilles soap ! ” From which followed learnedly the deduction that the chief ingredient in soap-bubbles is — soap. — Q. E. D.

The druggist had told me that he could *get* oleate of soda for me ; he knew there was such a thing, though not exactly what it was. Well, I knew both things now ; and I could get it for myself ; but I forgot to call and tell him so. I comfortably dismissed the matter from my mind, answered that first letter with my information to date, put my good gown and some collars and pocket-handkerchiefs into my smallest visiting valise, and went

off from Pine Pond to Little Valley, to stay a few days with my friend, Mrs. Ernest Seker, in company with my old friend, Miss Patience Strong.

We had a lovely time, and I forgot all my bubbles and my troubles. But on my return, lo! upon my swept and garnished writing-table, seven other letters more imploring and importunate than the first — making up the octave of my perplexity and self-reproach ; a note also from the Wise Blackbird, asking what WIDE AWAKE might say about it ; and a long verbal report administered in accompaniment by my pleasant hostess, of how the druggist's boy had knocked them up at eleven o'clock one night with "a bottle of Mrs. Whitelie's medicine," which he had forgotten to deliver.

There it was, upon my dressing-stand, a blue glass jar, paper-encased, carefully labeled in large print, as if it had been poison — "Oleate of Soda."

As if I did n't know what white Castile soap was, even when grated to impalpable powder and bottled up! I smelled and tasted ; no sort of doubt of its simple saponaceousness. I spilled a little into a glass of water, and stirred it up with the handle of my toothbrush. It came to a beautiful white lather, but there was no mystery about it. I seized a pipe and blew a bubble ; it was lovely, but it burst like any other bubble. Then I "put glythcerine into it ;" a bubble more brilliant and — yes, certainly more tenacious ; but I could not have picked it up and put it upon my mantel, to keep equal company with the Japanese crystal there. What *had* I said one could do with those buttered-crusty-bubbles ?

I tried quince bandoline in addition ; I tried mucilage ; I tried pulverized gum-arabic. I asked to have a little starch made, and tried that. I grew very sloppy, very sticky, and very tired ; still I could evolve nothing that

would stay evolved as I had sanguinely expected. Then I went to bed ; and in the watches of the night the inspiration came to me to write to your very self, before I replied to one of those seven letters, and to answer the Wise Blackbird by sending our whole correspondence to be printed in the WIDE AWAKE for the benefit of whom it might concern.

Now, dear Thankful, tell me kindly these two things, and my crusts will be buttered — for the present.

Did I exceed, hyperbolically, what you told me, in straight words, telephonically ? And what is your chemist's prescription — that I may put it into these petitioners' pipes and pacify them ?

Begging your pardon for the intrusion, and enclosing stamps for your reply — unless I happen to seal up and forget to, in which case I shall be comforted by remembering that the new postage is saving you a margin for just such emergencies,

I am yours in full faith and fellowship,

A. D. T. W.

[The above letter, sent to the Central Office, in the expectation that through the columns of WIDE AWAKE it would reach the eye of Thankful Holme, who, like Tupper's "wife of thy youth," was believed to be surely "living somewhere on the earth," since, even with the vision of imagination, you can indeed "see nothing that is n't there" — lay for a brief interval in the editor's drawer. Now, to this centre of reality many of the seers and tellers of Innerland drop in ; sometimes, also, they who are lovers and readers only ; and it so happened one day that two or three of them fell to discussing Soap-Bubble Parties and *Buttered Crusts*.

"I know quite well it is a fact," said a bright and

blessed lady; "I heard of it from an intimate friend who lives at Broadtop. Thankful Holme was a real girl, and she is really now Mrs. Raynald Shatoraine. They are in Italy; are going to spend the winter in Florence."

The WIDE AWAKE editor pulled out the manuscript "Open Letter." "We were sure of it!" she exclaimed. "Of her living and being, I mean. We were only waiting to add to our faith the knowledge of her whereabouts. Could you get her address?"

"Nothing more easy," was the reply. So then and there the "missing link" was discovered and joined on; the letter was dispatched by the next English steamer; four weeks later came back the reply; and the two are now placed on record together.]

LETTER II.

CASA GUIDI, FLORENCE, *December, 1883.*

MY DEAR A. D. T. W.: — I reply at once to your letter just received. So the thin defenses are broken down; Innerland, like Japan, is thrown open to foreigners; and not the story-tellers alone, but henceforth the story-people themselves may lie at the mercy of invaders, kind and complimentary, but unaware as individuals that their collective name is legion, and that a legion of anything may drive a hunted creature into the tombs. I am afraid you have been unwary; it is a dangerous precedent — to make public. It would have been a grand and charming thing — a Columbus discovery — kept to you and me, and our convives on either side. What lovely collusions — what complete and splendid understandings — there might have been! What bubbles we could have blown — putting our pipes together! But begun in this patent fashion, where is our shelter — what becomes of

our close corporation which is our power and privilege? As now the author is approached through the "care" of publishers (would that the care could sometimes be protection!), so we story-folk shall be besieged through our chroniclers, until with much explaining and supplementing of ourselves, and much writing of autographs, we shall find no time left us for *being*, and shall gradually vanish like the fairies, or dwindle into insignificance like the too delicious and well-beloved lobsters!

Dear Bo-Peeps of readers! When up you tooks your little crooks, determined for to find us — just consider! Be wise for yourselves; stop asking for more; keep quiet a little; let us alone, and we'll come home, and bring our best tales behind us!

This much on the defensive, and in honest answer to your representative preamble. Next for your questionings:

Even *you* may not demand too much "more" from Innerland. I am not sure that upon any other point — say upon how things happened at Aunt Salva's after Mrs. Shatoraine came to see me there, or reason why Mr. Shatoraine went out and dined with us at Broadtop; or what I had to wear one evening when we did n't have a soap-bubble party there — if those had been the inquiries — well, I don't think I could have enlarged your "Scrap No. 3," or have translated any of your "remote allusions." But I am full of interest in the bubble-builders; and a mention of that subject sets me off at once, as some people are touched off with a word upon the Pyramids or the Mounds.

You don't surprise me in the least with your experiences. I have traveled over the same road. The places in our lives that we skip, in telephoning to our amanuenses, are full of just the delays and waitings and stayings

where we were, that you others have. It won't do to put them all in the stories. Readers would n't live through them with us.

My chemist was of scarcely more use to me than yours. He only explained to me frankly that "oleate of soda" was as nearly as possible the same thing as pure white Castile soap. He also said that oleate of potash — soft soap — was even better "for a viscous fluid." I began to think there was nothing in it but a vicious fluid that would altogether elude and mock me. In short, all the prescriptions I could get ran, or might have run, thus :

Rx

Aquæ puræ,	ad lib.
Oleate potass :	} quantum suff.
vel	
Oleate sodæ :	
Misce.	
Suffla.	

I stood thinking while the man talked to me. I remembered the bubbles I used to blow at grandmamma's, when old Batsie made the suds for me, with hot soft water and a handful of brown topaz-colored jelly out of the big barrel that was always kept supplied with the real old-fashioned wood-lye-and-honest-kitchen-grease compound. There is no such soft soap now ; at least, I was sure I could not find any ; so I bought the next best thing of the chemist ; the bottled white dust such as was sent to you, and which makes such a soapy tingle in your throat and nostrils when you shake it out.

Then I, too, went home, shut myself up, and fell experimenting. I went through with the glycerine, the gum, the starch ; I tried besides, sugar, white of egg, and gelatine. Starch was the best. Soft warm water just

characterized with a fine, well-boiled preparation of it — not more substantial than ordinary rice-water — made into suds with oleate at discretion, resulted in tenacious bubbles which had a peculiar way of slipping of themselves, one after another, at a certain size, from the pipe-bowl, with the blowing from a single filling. They rolled and bounded in a smooth, elastic way upon my great gray Himalaya shawl, spread across the bed for them. Still, the tendency of such addition was to cause a denseness which seemed to separate itself from the clear water element, settling visibly and cloudily along the sides of the bubble and forming a sort of cup at its base like the cup of an acorn; in that way finally breaking it by its weight. It was almost a success, though, and I rested in it with a kind of half content for a day or two.

Then a lovely idea dawned suddenly. Glycerine — the “sweet principle of oil,” — and aqua ammonia, most delicate and pungent of alkalies!

I put these two together, in equal parts; the glycerine was etherealized. I added this spirit of soap to an “oleate” soap-suds — about two teaspoonfuls to a half pint of water, and had a beautiful bubble-party with only myself and the bubbles.

The soft, dark, blankety shawl stretched over my counterpane made an elastic level; and a handkerchief at hand, to brush off any drops, kept it in good condition. The ammonia seemed, while enhancing the sudsiness, to thin the mixture to that consistency which gave the most brilliant colors; these being always dependent, as you know from Professor Rogers, upon the tenuity of the film, and changing down its surface as the water, settling, leaves the upper part of the bubbles thinnest. Red falls lowest; then comes orange; then gold, green, blue, violet, in their order; the delicate tints only appearing as the

film grows more and more delicate. This is in accordance with the law of light, like that of sound ; the higher notes — the higher hues — coming with the more rapid vibrations or tremblings of the waves of air or light ; these in turn depending upon the subtilty and imponderableness of the medium. (This bit of lecture is for the benefit of the WIDE AWAKES, seeing that you did not put yours all in. They will be coming after us again if we leave any incomplete allusions.)

Well, I blew lots of bubbles, and dropped them one after another, each — from the same pipe-full — brighter than the last. They did everything I told you ; they rolled or dropped against each other without breaking ; sometimes two of medium size would rest against each other for a moment, and then sweetly explode into one, larger and finer than either. They rolled — or I blew them — across the bed, and they dropped down over the edge, disappearing in glory. I thought, at first, they were out, of course ; but presently I went round to the other side, and lo ! there was the whole pretty company of them sitting meekly about upon the carpet.

I blew big ones that were simply glorious. I had a little china mug in my hand, which I had filled with soap-suds for greater convenience ; and I achieved a new delight by carefully resting a bubble in the process of blowing, within its rim ; thus supported, I could swell and swell it, drawing cup and pipe gently apart as I did so, until the luminous thing was huge ; at last, often, I could withdraw the pipe cautiously, and hold my liquid balloon magnificently swaying its globe of color, with the china mug like a parachute car below it. Mind, I do not say that it would float the car up with it if I let it go !

And this brings me to the second part of your inquiry. Did you — intensify ? In nothing whatever that you

stated ; an omission, only, in one particular, heightened the effect. I do not know whether you or I did the omitting. We did "catch them on our hands and blow them off again," at the party ; but it was very tenderly, very dexterously, and *with mittens on* ! As to the racing, and the tennis, of course we did not play with bats or drive with whips. We did not kick them, or set foot upon them and croquet them. Gentle breathings, adroit and delicate puffs — to these they were altogether tractable ; and we did make sides and a dividing line upon the blanket, and a game of which party should send the most bubbles over into the opposite ground, and whose bubbles should be blown forth and back the longest without falling or breaking.

I think I cannot tell you very much more ; except that a bit of white Castile soap, in the solid, cut from a cake and kept in the suds, has proved every bit as effectual as the "oleate" powder.

I will just wind up with a mention of a bubble frolic we had here the other evening in our pleasant salon, with some American and English friends.

We had a big punch-bowl upon a side-table, full of the well-prepared soap-syllabub. Then each one of our number had a tiny, dainty harlequin cup, and a pipe of corresponding color. We had chairs around the long, low frame — not board — laid upon trestles so as to be just over our laps ; upon the frame a cream-white blanketing was smoothly strained and tacked at the edges. This, with its thick, velvety softness and its elasticity, was simply perfect. At the two ends sat the umpires ; an even number of players on either hand were the "sides."

First in turn — alternating the sides — we tried for the "biggest bubble." Next, the most gorgeous — each player using discretion as to blowing the first, or any sub-

sequent bubble from the same dipping. Then followed "the greatest number from a dip;" then — blowing by whole sides in turn — which party should get the larger number on the board at once. After that, we changed our sets by dividing across the board, like a tennis court; and we had the blowing across and back, in a game such as I have indicated before.

Over our heads was a brilliant gasalier with prism-fringes. I cannot tell you how dazzling and enchanting was the show and concourse of our fairy jewel-globes; nor how we were fascinated into hours of the beautiful foolishness. All solid, graspable things looked coarse to me afterward, until I came into fitness with them, and their different beauty again, gradually. — Dear A. D. T. W., this *is* a world of glory and delight that we are born into — both the inner and the outer of it!

I am yours, literally, to command — at the rubbing of the brain-lamp or the whisper at the thought-telephone. (Only don't let them *all* come and do it again, expecting us to receive and consider their messages; lest like Dickens's boy who kept swallowing the beads, we find ourselves well-nigh rattled to death with the accumulation!)

THANKFUL HOLME SHATORAINE.

HOW THE MIDDIES SET UP SHOP.

I.

"GET the boy a new pair of boots!" said Doctor Ken-cleverly.

Mrs. Frost had asked him if he did not think Sidney needed a tonic.

Sidney was the youngest of the Middies, and was slowly recovering from a mixture of mumps and measles. Algernon, the other Middy, stood by his brother's bed, dividing very dissatisfied glances between the doctor, who evidently ought to do something about it, and the sick Middy, who so inertly declined to do anything. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and Sidney had given up for the night. The boys had pasted a few postage stamps, looked over their card-album, and then Algernon had offered to play go-bang, which he did n't care for, but which Sidney ordinarily delighted in; instead of accepting which self-renouncing proposition, Middy number two had gone bang to bed.

"Get the boy a pair of new boots."

Algernon's face lighted up, and he flashed a quick look at Sid. Sid's countenance took no change, unless indeed the corners of the mouth dropped a little farther into disconsolateness.

"He don't care a hang!" muttered Algie; and went off disgusted. But his disgust, like that of many grown men, was largely affection and anxiety.

"Is he going to be mummy and measly all the rest of his life?" he asked Mrs. Laura, afterward.

"Wait till your turn comes," replied Mrs. Laura. "Then you'll understand."

"I've passed," returned Algernon, magnificently. He had just begun to play euchre with his sisters of an early evening half-hour since Sid had gone to being tucked up at four or five, ingloriously.

The boots came, and were set at the bedside. Sid leaned over, looked at them, and sighed.

"They look so awfully big and heavy," he said.

Algernon stared. He wondered if he ever could really feel like that about a stunning pair of brand-new boots.

"And they look like eggs and lemons and baking-powder and — beefsteak — and caraway-seeds," added Sidney, forlornly.

"Oho! Errands!" shouted Algie. "You're better, Sid, after all!"

"'T ain't fair, I know," said Sid. "You've done a heap of 'em since I've been sick, and you've been awfully tip-top and good-natured. But I don't feel as if I could do another one, ever again."

"Well, you sha'n't," said Algernon. "At least, not in the old, never-know-what-you're-about sort of way. Tell you what, Sid, the reason they call us Middies is because they think we're made just to be stopped short in the middle of everything — for *care* — away seeds!" And then Algernon went over and shut the door softly.

The girls might be in their open room close by, and were not to hear secrets. Besides, Ethelind and Celia had been known to allege another origin for the "Middy" title; putting the literal fact in a punning way that was not unsuggestive of sarcasm. At certain troublesome times they called these young fellows the "Middy-evils."

"I've got a new way of doing errands," said Algie, comfortably, coming back to his brother's bedside. "It

works first-rate sometimes, but it wants a plan to it, and you and I'll make one."

"Well — what?" asked Sid, slowly. Algie had stopped, like the specimen first page of a *New York Ledger* story.

"What — *what*?" he asked now, in his turn.

"Why, the new way."

"Oh, yes. That comes first, to be sure. Didn't know which part of it you meant. Well, you see, mother always tells Runy when she goes up and down stairs with things, to take something in both hands, and make her head save her heels. So I made my head save my heels; for when they sent me for lemons, I got nutmegs, too. And when it was buttons, I got machine-silk, or elastic straps. I kept an eye on the kitchen boxes, and on mummer's work-things. It did first-rate, most always; and when it did n't, mummer only laughed and said it was merely a question of time. And if there had n't been change enough out of her money, at Marh Mulligan's — when it was thready things — she paid me back. I keep a quarter of a dollar going on purpose. And, Sid, I've found out about capital and business. We could set up shop, you and I, and save our boots."

Sid fairly got up on his elbow. "Why, that would be kinder worth while getting well!" he exclaimed. "I have n't been playing possum, either, Al!"

"No; I know that. Though what they call it playing possum for, when they just mean *non possum*, I can't find out from the Latin grammar," answered Al, with the superiority of a boy just pretty well on in his irregular verbs.

"Now I sha'n't talk to you any more till after your egg-nogg. And here comes Dr. Ken. — I've given him something as good as the boots," he remarked to that gentleman, as he relinquished to him his place by the bedside.

"If you meddle with my practice you may take the case, young man," said Dr. Ken, getting his fingers upon Sidney's pulse. "Stronger: a little quick; momentary, that, I guess. Color improved—is that momentary? What have you been doing to him?"

"That's *my* practice," said Algernon, stoutly. "Guess if you can improve a minute, you can improve a day, if you keep on."

"Hullo!" said the doctor, turning round upon him. "Shouldn't wonder if I did have to look out for you, one of these days. Going to take to medicine?"

"No, sir. Don't like it well enough. Mean to trade in something I do like, when I begin."

"If you can keep to your likes in any trade, you'll be an exceptional son of Adam," said Doctor Kencleverly, returning his attention to his patient.

"And you *don't* like caraway seeds, nor mustard, nor rennet, nor yeast cakes, nor half the things; you know you don't, Al," particularized Sidney, in rather a whimsical, invalid way, it must be confessed.

"Shut up; you ain't half a boy again, yet," said Algernon.

II.

"The first thing," said Algernon, "is capital. How much can you put in?"

"Money? Oh, I've got lots. A quarter for that castor oil—and ten cents for the saffron tea—and ten cents a week more of allowance that I had n't a chance to do any thing with but save up—and a half that Aunt Lottie gave me—and a nickel that I sold those marbles for, 'cause marble time would be over before measles—it's a dollar and twenty; count up!" Sid reached out his little buckskin purse from under his pillow. Algernon counted the bright pieces.

"Well! that's jolly," he said. "I've only got my quarter. 'Cause I have n't gone into regular business, you know; I only made my time out of it, saving errands. Now, we'll trade, you see, and have a profit. — But look here," he broke out, after a sudden pause, "we ought to be both alike, or else, how shall we divide? You've got — 'most five times as much as I have — four times, leaving out the twenty cents. Then you ought to have four times as much out of what we make as I do. I'd rather be more even, Sid!"

"You ain't counted up your side yet," returned Sidney, quickly. "There's that ice-cream you bought me — that was twenty, I know; and the bunch of bananas, that was as much as twenty more. Twenty and twenty is forty; and then you've always halved with me ever since they let me have things, and you kept your library book a week more to read it to me when my eyes was weak — and" —

"You think I'm going to take pay back!" hooted Algie. "Like to see myself!"

"And you've got the whole plan, and started it, besides," concluded Sidney, not minding the interruption at all.

"Well, that's something, I s'pose," admitted square-minded Algie, after another pause. "And I s'pose, too, I'll have to do the running till you're strong enough. P'raps it's pretty fair. I'll tell you what: we'll go even halves, but I'll put my half into capital till it's up to yours, and you shall take your share for spendin's; and when we're even we'll take out and put in alike. See?"

"Won't it take a good while?" asked Sid.

"Well, yes; chargin' fair, it will. But there'll be my allowance, too. And there'll be tips, maybe. And p'raps I could sell out something. Joe Rabin wanted my chame-

leon top ; I'm tired of it. Anyhow," he began again, "we 'll start, on a dollar, say. You seventy-five, and I a quarter. Then you can buy the rest of your paints for the magic-lantern slides, and we 'll have the three-cent show. Ain't it first-rate old Doctor Ken keepin' you out of school all summer, hey ? "

The next question was the purchase of the stock. Sidney at first was for investing in varieties, that would make a show spread out upon a counter. Big-headed pins, and nickel-sheathed ones, stuck on a red cushion ; buttons and colored twine ; alphabet biscuits in a glass jar, and broken candy in another ; lemons and oranges ; five-cent tins ; emptied fruit-cans, to keep matches or anything in, piled up to look like business.

But Algie stopped him short. "We ain't *playin'*," he said. "It's goin' to be the real thing. And we can't hold on to tin pans and soap-shakers till somebody that don't want 'em wants 'em ; and oranges and candy spoiling unless we ate 'em up ; and all our money waiting to be got back again. We want to turn it right round, lively ; make it do one errand, and send it right off again on another. We've got to find out what's likely-sure to be wanted next. I've studied the market," he finished, grandly ; "I've been round this morning ; and there ain't but a scrapin' of bakin'-powder, and Runy always forgets it till the flour's sifted ; and the liquid-rennet bottle's all out, and so is the gelatine. There ain't much of the cooking-wine, but we can't set up in that yet — I'll have to put 'em in mind of some things so's to work in the others. And mother 'll come to depend on us for what we keep, you see. It'll be a regular line of trade, after a while. I sha'n't try on anything that I don't know — at least, not till I've made enough to enterprise with. Then, maybe, we might start out now and then with things she would n't

think of without she saw 'em ; nice new cheese, or a slice of fresh smoked salmon."

"Or tea-muffins, and a little jar of ginger," suggested Sidney, bringing forward a combination dear to his own palate.

"Yes. Folks buy lots of things just because they are put right under their noses. But it won't be pins nor tins, until I notice they 're scarce. I don't mean to play sell, nor I don't want anybody to play buy, as father did when we were little, always givin' us back the parcels after we had tied 'em up and taken the money."

The younger Middy looked at the elder with eyes in which appreciation grew. "You 're a great feller, Algie," he said. "You just know how. Go ahead. I'll leave it to you. Only don't get to be a man way out o' sight o' me!"

"Ho, you 'll catch up!" answered Algie, with fine encouragement. "It's some use to talk to a person that takes you in. And folks can be a man and a brother too, I expect — if they 're born so, and not a sculpin!"

III.

"Clo'espins!" said Joe Rabin.

Joe had been taken into partial confidence. He had bought the chameleon top for fifteen cents ; that had led to a certain explanation. The Middies needed somebody to whom to tell their fine plans, for the sake of appreciation. There is something in the wishful and admiring attitude of an outside boy, even if he only stands by during the eating of an apple, which represents the deference of a whole community to the successful man.

Joe Rabin would gladly have been a partner, though he carefully did not say so. He would have liked a piece of

the apple. But he did not even say, "Gimme a bite?" He waited, with a wise patience, which he had learned from such little experiences. The Middies were not sure, in their private counting-house consultations, that they would not have it so — perhaps. Joe was good-natured; had plenty of pocket money, and bright ideas. But it was of some of these ideas, added to the possibility of Mrs Laura's not approving of too large a firm, seeing that her little front attic and the right of way over her back stairs and her entry carpets were concerned, that Algernon was afraid.

"Too many 'll bust it all up," he said. Which is true of a great many partnerships and stock companies.

"Clo'espins!" volunteered Joe Rabin, as a suggestion. "They're always gettin' shied off under the bushes, an' broke in two, an' used up fer kindlin's. And when the wash is puttin' out — my! would n't a corner in clo'espins be a good thing?"

Joe Rabin belonged to a smart family, who enjoyed smartness, even only through the newspapers. He had heard his uncle — who had a broker-and-general-agency sign out, and lived on the horizon-edge of such things — talk them over imposingly with his father.

"We take care of our clothespins," said Algernon. "We have two cents apiece a week for picking them up, and bringing in the line." Algernon was particular about his terminal "g's" and other niceties of speech, when he talked with Joe Rabin, who let so many things slip.

"Good for you, then. You've got the inside track!"

Algernon stared. His uprightness was mystified for the first instant. In the next, his quick perception saw through the hint.

"I have *four* corners to my business," he said, proudly. "It's on the square!" And it was after that, that he quite

made up his mind that Joe Rabin would n't do for a partner. "Not at any price," he declared to Sid, who was rather impressed with Joe's sharpness, and inclined to be taught of him. It was good for Sid that Algie was First Middy, and head of the house.

"There's something to hitch on to in that clothespin notion," said Algie, a while after. "But it ain't on Joe Rabin's line. Hiding and cornering, and shoving and shifting" — he put on all his "g's" with dignified emphasis — "don't *make* anything, anywhere. You've got to

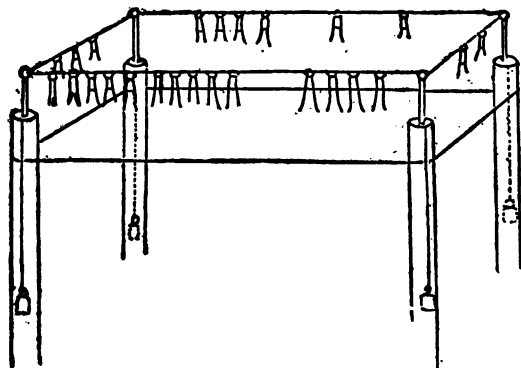


DIAGRAM OF CLOTHESPIN-LINE.

put in something, if you want to take it out, unless you like stealing, which I don't. I've been thinking out a thing, and it is this. I'm going to make a clothespin-line."

"What's that?"

"A string of 'em. Screw eyes in 'em — or double tin-tacks will do, and be cheaper — and hang 'em all together on a cord — fishline's the thing; fix some round sticks, or have some long spike-pins, with holes through the top-

ends — kind o' needle-rods, or nails — and drive 'em into the tops of the clothes-poles; run the lines through the holes, and put sinkers on the ends, and let 'em hang down — to keep the lines taut, or let 'em out, as you pull down the pins, you see."

Sid looked a little as if he did not see; and Algie picked up a piece of chalk — they were in the tool-room together — and began to illustrate on a board (*see diagram*): —

"There; those under lines are the regular clothes-lines; the upper ones are the pin-lines. You hang the sheets and things on the under lines, and pin 'em down as you go along. There you have it; pins always ready, clean, up in the air; the Runies and Biddies won't have to carry 'em in their teeth any more, nor fling 'em all round the lot when they pull 'em out, and then hunt 'em out of the grass and the gravel, or sing out for more, when they want 'em again."

"They'll get wet, and rot out, sometimes, won't they?"

"That'll be the trade; they do now. We'll keep 'em on hand — fishlines and sinkers, and eye-headed clothes-pins; string on a new lot when you want 'em — after you've got the posts fixed — don't you see how good it'll be?"

"Ye-es," said Sid, slowly. "But how'll they flop the sheets and things over the line, with the pin-lines in the way?"

Algernon looked for a half minute as if there were a missing link in his creation; but suddenly brightened up to say — "Why, they *won't* flop 'em over at all! they'll just double 'em up in the middle, or take 'em by the edge, and pin *that* over — the proper way," he boldly asserted, as people do sometimes most boldly assert the thing that has but just occurred to them.

Nevertheless, Algernon was right; and came to his rightness by a process of fit adjustment of one good thing to another.

"They 'll last a long time," said Sid. "We sha'n't have much trade in clothespins."

"Pho! You ain't any calculator at all!" cried Algie. "Improvements always make business. We've got the whole thing to sell. How much should we ever make on three-cents-a-dozen clothespins? We sha'n't have any extra cost but the string and the tin-tacks — and the spikes, perhaps; and mummer 'll give us a dollar a set, like 's not — for the putting up and all."

Then Sidney fired up all at once with enthusiasm, as slow-match people do when the powder catches.

"Don't tell anybody!" he cried. "Let's make a lot of 'em before we show out at all; and sell 'em all over the hill at once, before folks copy! all fair to hide that much, ain't it?"

"'Course. That's our patent. Tell you what, Sid, it 'll be a first-rate concern, all of itself — if folks 'll only buy. Why, think of ten dollars for a capital in the general grocery line! How's that for high?"

The boys really did string their clothespins, and put up the spikes for six separate customers, including Mrs. Laura. They paid fifty cents for two balls of large, strong, smooth English twine — they did not afford fish-line in their first venture; — forty more to the blacksmith for a lot of iron pins bored at one end; two cents a dozen, at wholesale, for clothespins, of which they arranged five dozen to the set; seventy cents for half a dozen boxes of tin-tacks; two dollars and twenty cents for the whole; making, as it resulted, a profit of three dollars and eighty cents. To do all this, they had waited till their first capital, by Algie's careful application of the

principle of demand and supply, had been "turned round lively" several times, with fair increase. Then Sidney put in the fifty-five cents which he had reserved for glass-paints; notwithstanding which additional sum on his part, Algie had, by the top sale, that of a second-best jack-knife, and one or two lesser bits of personal property, with his weekly allowances, brought his money share of the partnership some thirty cents nearer an equality; at which point, in consideration of "ideas," and "experience," which their father had told them always counted, they decided to go cheerfully on and "call it even."

They did not buy all their twine and tin-tacks and clothespins at once, and they only had four spikes forged; with an understanding as to prices according to future purchases. They made Mrs. Laura's lines first, and got her acceptance and encouragement, under stern promise of secrecy. This, Mr. Frost told them, was entering a "caveat."

They gathered together a quantity of old lead, which they melted and ran in disks with holes through the middles, for side-weights, or "sinkers;" through these they were to knot the ends of their lines.

A few days' busy work with gimlet and string and pins, and a file for smoothing the spike-eyes, completed in the end the whole half-dozen sets; then Runy was put in possession of hers, and made a Monday's trial brilliantly. A neighbor's girl strolled in from an errand as she was taking in her clothes from drying. Runy ripped off the pins, letting them fly, as she went along, with the most delightful abandonment. When she had piled the four lines-full of white linens and cottons in a sweet, rough heap upon the big clothes-basket, she turned back upon her round without remark, pushed each section of hanging pins into a big cluster against a post, gave the weight

at that end a pull which drew the opposite one up chock, and so, with a quiet ostentation, smoothed the whole arrangement tidy for the next hanging. No one would have supposed it to be the first time she had made use of the convenience. But then, it is the peculiar genius of the class "girl" — and in opposite ratio to its advance in civilization — to take for granted most coolly whatever latest improvements the century and the Republic provide for it; as if it were but a tardy importation from the resources and long familiar use of the luxurious cabins on the other side. To be astonished is as far from the serene highnesses of the "intelligence" order, as from the stoical red Indian or the London dude. I heard, the other day, the calm comment of a woman from the rural depths of New Brunswick, on her first search for a "situation" in Boston. She had been sent to an advertisement address. "It was as big and handsome a private house as I ever seen," was her casual report. She had been to Hotel Vendome.

"That 's a putty good way them lines comes now, is n't it thin?" asked Nora, with wisely guarded interest.

"'Dade, an' they 're but jist come, thin, an' ther 's but the wan place ye can git 'em," returned Runy, picking up her heavy basket with a tug of strong muscles and a backward strain of her whole body, as she partly swung her burden forward with her knees, moving capably toward her kitchen door with it, and sending her words over her shoulder at the same time to her friend who followed. "'Tain't the valye o' the pins, annyway, but the muss and fuss o' droppin' 'em an' huntin' 'em out o' the dirt. Yer 've alwers got 'em, ye see, t' yer han'. Yes — it 's good enough — for wan thing."

Nora reported at home, in the laundry at "Troopers," as she easily called her place of resident service. And

the next week the Trupearas had the Middy "eye-and-line attachment."

It worked excellently well all through the neighborhood; the reason it has not spread further is because inventions always move slowly unless you sell out your patent for a trifle to a company, who will obligingly introduce it for their own large realizing; and the Middies preferred a local manufacture, and the securing of such proceeds as might be; through which little way of the world it is that the world is kept waiting for this, and for many another nice thing.

IV.

Custom was dull, sometimes, of course. The house-girls from the Brim did not always stop at the Middies' shop to save their time, though Mrs. Laura had allowed the boys to move to the lower floor for the advantages of trade and in consideration of back stairs and carpets. In fact it was only since they had had their quarters in the little basement that used to be a store-room, under the area-steps that led to it and to the cellars, that their more extended custom had come in. Nora, from the Trupearas, making friendly calls in Runy's kitchen, had learned the convenience of the social and domestic combination, and had run in often for yeast-cakes, which — of the compressed sort — were a trouble to keep supplied, and of inappreciable profit, though serving a purpose as drawing other trade. But since their basement opening there had been a pretty steady run; hardly a day without two or three sales at least, besides home consumption; only varying as the house-girls aforesaid fancied the varying of their trips by keeping on into the village or failed of the convenience of small change, which the ladies of the

Round might not always have at hand or stop to look for, although they patronized through their servants, in a half-amused and half-accommodated way, the amateur establishment so comfortably at hand.

It was on one of a succession of dull mornings, when only the two young Trupearies had been in and bought cornballs, that Sidney abruptly broke forth : —

“ I say, Al! this ain’t much fun, after all. Let ’s get up a peep-show.”

“ No.” Algie answered with brief decision.

“ Why not? The boys would all come. Might be a cent show, or a tenpinner; and pins help the concern, you know.” The shop was usually “ the concern,” now, in the partners’ consultations. Pins, strings, and wrapping-papers were carefully saved and put up in balls, boxes and bundles, as merchandise; costing nothing but the collecting, so that the very cheap rate at which Mrs. Laura and her older daughters repurchased their waifs was all profit; there being but one stipulation — that the boys, on honor, were to take no pins from cushions or papers for their stock.

“ As if we would!” Algie had cried, indignantly. “ We ’d as soon crib off Ma’am Mulligan’s counters!”

Mrs. Laura had used to save string herself; but it was a luxury to hand over the wraps and ties of parcels to the Middies, and to receive them again, for a small tax, neatly sorted, wound, and folded.

So Sid argued for his peep-show, as a side departure, that it would bring in convertible property at least. But Algie reiterated his “ no.”

“ I shall stick to my line,” he said. “ There ’s always dull times in business. That ’s part of the — experience.” He caught himself just in time to substitute the maturer word for the boyish and forbidden “ play,” that he had been very near using.

"But you went into the clothespins," said Sidney.

"They warn't off the line," declared Algernon, not perceiving his pun till he had made it, and then leaving it unnoticed to follow his graver intention. "That grew out of the business, and was to make capital. An invention might happen to anybody. But that is n't to be the rule. A *peep-show*!"

"Well, you said the three-cent magic lantern, a while ago," persisted Sidney.

"So I did," acknowledged Algernon. "And that does amount to something on your side. But I don't know as I should say it now. I've looked into things since then, and I don't believe in mixing up. I would n't set up Barnum's greatest on earth, if I had it, unless I gave up groceries and domestic varieties first, and went slap into the beastly varieties instead. There's no sense in being in but one thing at a time."

Mrs. Laura heard this bit of conversation from her little flower-balcony overhead, as she indeed often got scraps of private counting-house conversation, without coming there to listen, or ever listening long without giving audible hint, or direct announcement of her presence. "You know I'm often out here, boys," she would say.

"Mother's a gentleman!" Algernon said of her, once. "Lady" was too limited a term, besides being a matter of course, to express the out-and-out style of nobility that he meant by it; there was a force in the honor which she practiced and taught them, which nothing short of full manliness in a man's opportunities and exigencies could test and illustrate.

Mother Laura told her husband of the *peep-show* talk. Stewart Frost laughed, but his eyes shone. "There's stuff in that boy," he said. "I should like to be sure that the two would be grown-up partners some day," he added

presently. "Sid needs just that kind of veto-power and example over him."

"Well, he'll have it for half a dozen years to come," said Mrs. Laura, hopefully. "By that time there may be two of them. Sid sees things, when they're put in the right light."

"But Al never takes a side-squint," said Mr. Frost. "However, there is time, as you say. And their mother's a gentleman!"

"This shopkeeping is more than a play," the father remarked again, after an interval in which he had apparently forgotten it in the reading of the evening paper.

"Everything is more than a play," said Mrs. Laura.

"Highly sententious and most intrinsically true," said Stewart. "A good solution to half the difficulties of education. But it is curious, nevertheless, how the principles of trade come up and develop in this boy business. I'm looking out just now for a corner in lemons. It's the dry time for them, and Porson's stock has been getting low. I noticed Algie examining them the other day, when he stopped in on his way to town with me. He brought out some heavy stuff in your borrowed bag; but I don't see any display of the article yet on his counter. I never ask him any questions, or make suggestions; I only hold myself ready to answer anything he may ask me."

It fitted right on to this, that the very next morning, the two Middies walking down to the train with their father, Algernon put the inquiry — "Papa, how much do you think it's fair to put on to the price of things that are perishable, to pay for the perishing?"

"Well," replied Mr. Frost, deliberately, "we'll put a case. A man brings a cargo of oranges and bananas from the West Indies and Florida. It costs him a certain sum to equip his vessel, feed and pay his men, and buy his

cargo. He must get back all that, and a fair percentage of profit for carrying on the business. If he does the best he can, sells his fruit as soon as he can after it gets here, takes all the care possible that it is not injured needlessly in the handling, and then finds from experience that a twentieth part, say, is lost from the nature of the goods — I suppose that twentieth of the original cost should be added to the valuation of the lot in calculating the average price. It is the same thing as a duty which he has to pay for bringing them in."

"Well, then," said the boy, "if he saves up for a scarce time, he must n't expect to get back what he loses while he's waiting, must he?"

"That's one of the things a man settles with his own mind," said Stewart Frost. "With most men, as the world of business goes, the must n't applies to the losing — in any way. Nothing is to be lost that they can make other people pay for."

Algernon was silent a minute. Then he said, "It don't seem to me, father, that that's doing things up square."

Then his father was silent, and Algernon spoke again.

"When I play a play, I want the rules to be made plain and fair, all round, and kept to; or else there is n't any real hang-together to it. And I should think it ought to be so with what men do; or else there's no fun in the whole big play of the world."

"In the big play, Algie," said Mr. Frost, "there are some big rules, to be sure; there are some things that are clearly against the law, and that people would be disgraced and punished for; but there are ever so many little variations and exceptions that each one has to decide for himself as he goes along."

"And if a good many people do the same way, it *makes* a kind of rule?" put Algernon, interrogatively.

"Exactly so. It becomes public opinion; tone of trade; the unwritten code of commerce."

"And I should think everybody would want that to be first-rate," said Algie.

"Anybody would think so," returned his father. "And yet, come to practice, the world gets into considerable of a snarl."

"I should n't want to be one to put a kink into it," said the boy, manfully.

"Keep on thinking so, and maybe you'll help to take a kink out," answered the man, childlikely.

"It must needs be that offenses come, but woe unto him by whom the offense cometh." Neither of them remembered the words at the moment; possibly the child did not yet know them; but the Word that was nigh them had said to them the same thing, out of the same Life.

V.

One afternoon, not long after this, the Ostridges, upon the Round, sat in their summer dining-room, over their dessert.

"I wonder how many 'miles' we are 'from a lemon,'" said Mrs. Ostridge, as the waitress placed before her some dainty dish in which lemons had been desired, but something different substituted. "Cook tells me Porson has nothing but 'skins and bones' left. I think, Talfrey, I must trouble you to inquire in town to-morrow," she added, to her husband.

Talfrey, Junior, glanced up from his plate. "I know who's got some; elegant ones, too," he said.

Mrs. Ostridge looked surprised.

"It's Frost Brothers," continued the youth, calmly. "Mr. Stewart Frost's boys. They've got a solemn-ear-

nest store, father, down in their basement. I saw lemons there this morning."

"I should like to see a solemn-earnest store — particularly one kept by a firm of boys," said Mr. Talfrey Ostridge. "In what do the solemnity and earnestness consist?"

"In having it all regular, and keeping it up, and not eating up the goodies, and studying the market" — here he was quoting — "and laying in supplies of what's sure to be wanted, and doing everything on the fiercest kind of a square," responded Talfrey, Junior.

"I should like to see it more than ever," said Mr. Ostridge. "Would it be proper for you to introduce me there — to buy a lemon — in Mr. Stewart Frost's basement?"

"Why, we all go. The servants go, from all round, to do errands; and we boys get the jolliest things that they don't keep anywhere else. The Frosts know how to do things, I can tell you, father. Mrs. Shatoraine is up at Lebanon this summer, and she sent 'em some awfully delicious butternut-and-maple, and those boys put it right into their stock, and sent for more. Why, father, they just know how to do business! and their father lets 'em, and *anybody* can go."

"Very well; very interesting, and quite satisfactory," replied Mr. Ostridge; which his son readily understood to signify "that will do." For there were grown people at the table besides the family, and conversation was now quietly reverted to them and to topics that had gone before. But half an hour after dinner was over, Mr. Ostridge, sitting on the terrace, threw away the end of his cigar, and rose up, calling to "Tal."

"We'll look in among those impressively intense small groceries," he said.

"Not if you make fun, father," said young Talfrey, stoutly. "I won't go with you, unless you behave just as if it was men. There's no make-believe about Algie and Sid; and there is n't anything to make believe *to*."

"How could there be, in people and transactions so fiercely vital and on the square? Come along, Tal, you can trust me, I think," he added, in a different tone.

Talfrey, Junior, took his father's hand, which he was not yet ashamed to do, saying, "So I can, father, now *you're* on the square about it," and they walked through the shady Round, and over the Brim, and down the slope, together.

Algernon and Sidney were busy in their basement room, with the area door pleasantly open toward the grass plot, and the flagged walk between the flower borders that ran round the side and rear of the olive-colored house. They were taking fresh lemons out of their clean, soft paper wrappings, in which, and then in a keg of sawdust from their carpentry shop, they had carefully repacked them when the fruit had first come home from New York. It was a fine lot that Algie had found and bought quite fortunately just before lemons had "jumped" to the extent of two or three cents apiece in price. He had given twenty-eight cents a dozen for them.

They heard footsteps coming down into the area, and shadows presently darkened the doorway. Mr. Ostridge and young Talfrey stood there.

"My wife has sent me for a lemon," said the head of the truly grand firm — head and shoulders above ordinary ones, in both position and character — of Ostridge, Casawarie and Company.

Algernon Frost stood up from his unpacking, and laid a couple of his best specimens, fresh from their wraps, upon his counter — an extension-leaf of his mother's

dining-table, put across from the lowermost of the store-room shelves to a stool placed opposite. There was neither surprise, nor fun, nor make-believe, nor any assertion against pretense in his manner. He was precisely and thoroughly and simply a dealer answering to a call.

"There are some, sir," he said, and looked up at Mr. Ostridge, waiting.

"Why, these are fine ones," said the customer. "Have you many more like these? they are out of market just now, I thought."

"Yes, sir. I bought them three weeks ago, in New York."

"Kept for a rise, eh?"

"Well, yes, partly. And partly to be sure to sell. When everybody has plenty, sometimes they get left on hand."

"And if nobody has any at all, except Frost Brothers, they can make a sharp corner in lemons," said Mr. Ostridge, laughing.

"I guess I don't believe in *sharp* corners," said Algie Frost.

"Only right-angled ones," suggested the gentleman.

"Four to a square," supplemented the boy, brightly.

"How about Joseph, down there in Egypt? was n't that rather a sharp corner in wheat?" went on the purchaser, setting aside, in a half-absent way, some four or five lemons from the heap upon the little counter. It was evident the conversation had begun to interest him more than his errand.

Algernon looked up with consideration in his eyes.

"Why, no — I should think not," he said, after a few seconds' pause. "He did n't keep it out of the way when it was wanted. He only saved up what they might have wasted while it was plenty; and then had it all ready for

them when the famine came. I should call that right-angled enough."

"I suppose he got his price. What do *you* ask for these lemons?"

"Three cents apiece, sir."

"Why, Porson gets four cents for 'skin and bones.'"

"I thought three cents was fair enough pay. I gave twenty-eight cents a dozen. That leaves me eight cents profit."

"And that's a percentage?" —

"Of about twenty-eight," answered Algernon promptly.

"Oh! you've learned to figure percentages, then?"

"Well, a fellow must," returned Algernon.

Mr. Ostridge laughed. "You might have doubled your money, all the same," he said.

"I like one rule all the way through, and to work it out," said the boy.

"So do most people; only rules vary," returned the banker. "The commonest one is — 'Buy cheap, and sell dear;' as cheap and as dear as you can."

"That ain't so much working things out as grabbin' 'em in, is it?" asked the young grocer.

"You go in for a system, I see. Of the best general economy. Well; suppose I buy out your stock?"

"Of lemons? I'd rather not sell them all to one person, sir."

"Why? I'll pay you three and a half cents apiece for the lot."

"Then maybe somebody else would have to go without. I'm trading for the neighborhood. And how do I know but *you'd* make a corner?" he added, with a twinkle of voice and eye.

Again Mr. Ostridge laughed. "I suppose next week, if lemons don't come in meanwhile, you'll ask four or five

cents. Why should n't I supply myself, or even corner, against that?"

"No, I sha'n't. They won't be costing me any more."

"Are you sure of that? Where's the interest of your money?"

Algernon laughed. "Why, the interest of one dollar sixty-eight would n't be much for a week, I guess," he said.

"But suppose it had been one hundred and sixty-eight thousand dollars?" asked Mr. Ostridge. "We're talking about principles of business, you see."

"Yes," answered the boy, slowly. "I see. I should have to calculate, if I ever came to that. But maybe I could find a right-angle to it somehow."

Then Mr. Ostridge bought five lemons, laid down a quarter, and received ten cents in change; said "thank you," and "good-afternoon," and walked away. Talfrey, Junior, his hands in his pockets and a look in his face as if he had got something to think of, followed his father.

"Talfrey," said Mr. Ostridge, as they walked up the hill into the Round, "I should just like to see a generation of boys like that grow up in New York. There would be a few things different on Wall Street, and on Fifth Avenue, too, I fancy. Do you know you boys have got pretty much everything in your own hands, after all?" he asked his son, with sudden energy.

"Except what we come into ready made, and stiffened," returned the son. Talfrey Ostridge was fourteen years old; and boys of fourteen, in these days of electric lamps and general tremendous illumination, get keen sight of things.

"Yes; *we* boys must n't leave it all for you to do," said the honorable man of bills and exchanges.

Frost Brothers went on selling six dozen lemons, at

three cents apiece. Every day came some call for them. Algernon turned them over in the basket, wiping each one carefully, every day or two ; so they kept fair and freshly yellow to the end. Meanwhile, the next week, Porson had in a new lot ; average good ; he asked five cents apiece for them.

Mr. Ostridge, coming up from the train one afternoon, found himself, as different people overtook or passed each other by, alongside Algie Frost.

"Ah, Frost," he said, "I'm glad to see you. What's high for lemons, to-day?"

"Same price, with me, sir."

"Porson says you're underselling. I told him what we were paying you. He thinks you ought to stand by the trade."

"If I'd bought this week, I suppose I should have had to. It is n't my fault if I can afford to ask less. Those things always happen by chances, don't they? The advertisements are full of 'em, anyway."

"Have you read up that story of Joseph again, yet? Do you know what price he put upon wheat in the famine? It must have been something to suit Pharaoh, and the Egyptian Treasury, we must suppose."

"Yes, I did read it," said the boy. "I thought I should like to see what it said. And there is n't a word of the price anywhere. Only, that Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to all the people of the land what they wanted ; and that all the countries round came to Joseph to buy corn. And they could n't all have been rich, you know. Besides," he added, gently, "Pharaoh could n't have been a bad sort, that only wanted to grind out money from the people ; for what he said, first of all, about getting a man to take care of things, was, 'Can we find a man in whom the spirit of God is?' It ain't exactly the

way they look up men nowadays — for the rings and corners, is it?"

And Algernon flashed up one of his quick looks to Mr. Ostridge's face.

Mr. Ostridge did not answer. But the boy met nothing to deter his simple freedom. "So I conclude that the Bible corners were a little different," he ended.

Mr. Ostridge's head went up a little way into the air, and he took a slightly lengthened breath, as of interrogation. "There are some other Bible corners you might run against, that might not argue precisely the same," he said. "Some people seem to have learned from further back than Joseph."

"Maybe some corners are put there to show us the ways *not* to turn," said Algernon.

"Are you going to be a grocer, or a minister?" asked his friend, laughing out. But there was a kind of shining sympathy in the generous eyes that, in turn, looked down upon the lad.

"There isn't so much difference between the two, if they're both first-rate of the sort, is there?" questioned the solemn-earnest shopkeeper.

"What are you going to do with that oldest boy of yours?" the banker asked Mr. Frost, walking down the ferry platform beside him the next day, from the morning train to New York.

"I think I shall let him do something with himself, first; and then help him, if I can."

"Send him to me, six years hence, if he wants a chance, and I'm left to give it. I'll find him a place, if there's one for anybody, and he likes it."

But Algernon sold the last of his lemons at three cents, and never knew that the chief of Ostridge, Casawarie & Co. had said a word to his father about him.

VI.

Joe Rabin was the apothecary's son. He had learned the knack from Hurse, his father's assistant, of tying up little parcels neatly, and of cleverly twisting the cord into the "trade-knot." He had also got the impression that a bottle, a box, one of these knotted parcels — above all a label — made instantly the difference of a hundred to five hundred per cent value in the article so bottled, boxed, tied, or labeled. "Putting up" — not the prescriptions or stuffs themselves — was the essential part of the business.

"There's where the money is," he confided to Algie Frost. "I've seen Hurse take in a half a dollar for a bottle of lime water. Did n't cost eight cents — bottle, cork, and all. And once, when he made a mistake changing a bill, and took seventy-five cents when he meant to charge a dollar and seventy-five, he said, 'Well, it might 'a' been worse. Made fifteen cents on it, anyhow!'"

"I don't call that business," replied Algie.

"I'd just like you to say what you do call it, then!" retorted Joe.

"I don't know as there's any name for it," Algernon answered, quietly.

"Look a-here!" cried Joe, using privilege and going round behind the counter. "Why don't you put up this butternut-maple? I can get pill-boxes for nothing — 'most," he added, prudently. "I c'd let you have 'em — seein' it's you — for four cents a dozen; that's only a third of a cent apiece; an' you c'd sell the stuff three cents a box, easy."

"Pill-boxes!" ejaculated Sidney, with a laugh. "The' ain't much appetite in a pill-box!"

"Well, powder-boxes, then; slidin' ones; pink, and blue, and lavender, and straw color. I *tell* you they'd go. And hold more. Could ask five cents f'r 'em, even change! I'll help you put up. Say so?"

Joe Rabin had been round behind the counter more than ever, and more full than ever of suggestions, since the tin can of sugar-and-butternuts had come from Lebanon. Algie managed to keep a friendly nearness to him, however; and all Joe could do was to circulate, with the sublimest forbearance, around the can, his eyes keeping a radius-line with the central attraction, a warm moisture about his lips, and his hands, with the most obvious virtue, in his pockets.

"It keeps better where it is," said Algernon. "Guess you'd better move out now; I've got these bundles to sort."

"Lemme help," said the devoted Joe.

"Well, if you're achin' to, there's that twine out there to be weaver-knotted and rolled up. Keep the sizes separate, that's all." He motioned to a big crash pocket that Sidney had left upon the doorstep when Madge had called him away just now, for a "very particular thing indeed;" Madge and Bobby being in the middle of a pack, to go away for a holiday visit at Aunt Frost's in Norchester.

"Not much fun in that," said Joe, cloudily, and leaning back upon his elbows across the counter-edge out of Algie's way, with his hands still in his pockets. "Sid'll be back presently."

"There is n't room in here just now for more than one," said Algernon, plainly.

At that, Joe Rabin put his hands on the counter behind him, lifted himself to a seat upon the same, and whirled himself around as upon a pivot, till his legs were on the other side.

"Need n't be so frost-y about it," he remarked, leisurely, remaining as he was for a half-minute.

"That counter won't stand much of that style of jumping," said Algernon. "Be careful, won't you?"

Some glass jars, one holding Salem Gibralters, bought and sent to the boys' order by cousin Kitty Frost, who fortunately lived in the city famed for these and for old East-India-nabob families, were upon the walnut leaf which had slipped startlingly at the stool end, with Joe's movements.

Joe got down upon the customers' side.

"I was goin' to invest a few in butts," he said, carelessly; "but you're so busy, I'll call again, *p'raps*." He rattled some pennies in the pockets where he had got his hands again, and sauntered to the door.

"All right," said Algie, from down behind. "If you're in no hurry, I ain't." At which Joe sauntered back again.

"Are them real Salems?" he inquired, lifting the glass cover of a Mason jar.

"Yes," answered Algie, rising to the question, and taking the cover from Joe. "Two for five cents."

"Tuck it onter *them*, don't yer?"

"Have to. Special article. Comes higher than the common, and there's postage. Cent an ounce, you know."

Meanwhile, Joe had helped himself to one and taken a bite. "They're good, if they *are* dear," he said, suavely, with a second crunch at the toothsome confection, and making as if he would so depart. "I'll take another next time, and pay then."

"I don't sell that way. Three cents apiece, Mr. Rabin, if you please, and cash down."

Joe laughed, as if they both knew better in this shop

play ; but catching Algernon's eye, perceived so plainly what was meant, that he drew a nickel from his pocket. "Down it is, then," he said, gruffly, flinging the coin upon the board with energy. "Give us another."

Algernon complied, as matter of course, and drew the money over into his till — a lock-box, set under the leaf with cleats and slides. "Anything more this morning ?" he asked, civilly.

"Confound it, no ! You're too shopkeepery a fellow for me, Al. Makes no difference whether you know a feller or not."

"Oh yes, it does," said Algernon, with his peculiar quietness. But at last Joe Rabin had got out the door.

No danger but he would come back again. Joe could not take offense — were it thrust at him — so long as the goodies lasted. Besides being constitutionally of a lymphatic good nature, he purred, like a cat, so much more for the sake of comforts than of company, that even when roused to something like resentment or retort, he always finished his roughest sentence with the familiar and condoning nickname. He plunged into no deep water without a rope round his waist that he could pull back by.

Algernon had begun by giving him privileges ; even by occasionally standing treat. But he had got very tired — and something a little more uncomfortable than tired — with the loitering, hankering, soft-mouthed way in which Joe Rabin infested his business premises. It bound him to his charge inconveniently at times. He would not, for a good deal, put mistrust and stinginess into Sidney's mind toward the boy ; but he knew very well that his little brother's shrewdness and decision were not of a sort to stand against Joe's patient and wily parallels and approaches. When the elder partner was absent from the shop, Joe could get many a little overweight or overcount,

or gratuitous nibble, with a "you know me," out of Sidney's mistaken politeness or the shamefacedness that the child took on vicariously; seeing that the big fellow had none of it.

Of late, the uncomfortableness had become with Algernon a positive doubt and apprehension. There had been a deep pinch once or twice in the butternut can, and a crumbing on the floor beside it, that he knew he had himself never made. His money counted ten cents short one night when he had let Joe Rabin serve a purchaser; and he missed the very dime that he knew Rob Casawarie had paid in for "Salems." Even more than all this, the trickiness in Joe's talk, and the mean, hankering way he had in the neighborhood of creature-comforts, grew in their repulsion upon him, as they showed more constantly and plainly. He hated them on his own part, and shrunk from their contagious demoralization on the part of Sid. "If he should ever make Sid pilfer from the stock!" he thought with horror. He would rather throw up the whole concern, and divide the tempting commodities, once for all; give up Frost Brothers, and go back into Middy child-life again, than to have that happen!

The worst of it all was that it set him to watching Sid. He caught himself at it once and again, in little ways; and oh! how he clutched and shook himself mentally, when he suddenly realized it. He felt himself then altogether the meanest of the three. Joe might be innocent; he might be even resisting great temptations in the very mouth-waterings which were so evident, and which made Algernon so doubt and despise him. And Sidney was a little boy; he must remember that; two years, at the age when a boy makes his first spring toward manhood, are such a difference! Sidney did not notice all that he himself could not help noticing. He had, too, an innocent

little sweet tooth of his own, which had always been less with Algernon, and which Algernon was fast outgrowing. Every afternoon, the elder partner allowed and provided for this, by giving Sidney, and partaking himself, of a certain prescribed quantity of the Shaker dainty ; making scrupulous distinction between this item of their stock in trade, which had cost them nothing, but had been a gift for their pleasure, and the articles which had really been money investments and represented a portion of their capital. Of these, it was clearly understood that neither should ever take without paying.

Algernon was learning to keep some small business books properly, under his father's criticism and direction in the evenings. There was added motive of pride for him in this, had he needed any ; he had such strong satisfaction in his little weekly balance-sheet, upon which purchases, sales, and account of stock on hand, came each with its due and clean fitting-in, to the fair and accurate footing up in identical figures on the debit and the credit sides. He liked his father to say, as he did once or twice. "That's business-like ; that isn't like boy's play."

One afternoon, late in the season, it befell that the senior partner of our firm was drafted away by his mother and Ethelind to drive them a distance of three or four miles for a friendly call. He had to leave Sidney in sole charge.

"I would n't let anybody in to look round, Sid," he said to him in giving instructions. "Don't make talk, or take anybody in behind. Just attend to errands, and stop there."

"I can't tell 'em to go," pleaded Sid, perplexed. "It might be Mr. Ostridge, or Talfrey, or Rob Casawarie ; and you always talk to them, you know."

"If they begin it, yes ; and you may ; but — well, I

can't explain the difference; they don't *loaf*; only just make up your mind there sha'n't be any loafing, and feel your way to steer clear of it. Takes two to make out most anything, let alone quarreling; and it's a good thing to learn how to keep out of what you don't want. If you can't do anything else, you can lock the door and sit up in the porch and make paper bags. That won't interest a loafer much, and we want some."

The increase of business had for some time prevented any accumulation of surplus wrapping-paper; with paste-pot and scissors and a strip of shingle to fold over, this was handily turned into the aforesaid bags for their own use.

"Well," answered Sidney, somewhat slowly; "only it don't interest me a great deal, either; not as much as 'Carrots,' anyhow."

"Well, read 'Carrots' then; that'll do as well, or better. Only keep an eye for real customers; and — don't be lonesome, old boy!"

The pat on the shoulder with which Algie left him had no less loving compunction of the elder brother in it, for his not being able to feel quite so certain of everything in Sid's care as in his own, than for leaving him alone this bright afternoon with only shopkeeping and "Carrots" to amuse him; which he was truly very reluctant to do, notwithstanding Sid had had his choice as to shutting up shop and accompanying them.

It must be owned, however, that the overtaking of Joe Rabin on the Valley Road, with bat on shoulder, on his way to the base-ball ground at Pixley Pasture was a sudden lightening to his spirits; insomuch, that, with a hasty pantomime to his mother, he pulled rein.

"Have a ride, Joe?"

"Oh, guess not. 's lieves walk. Where goin'?"

"Over to Pine Orchards. Right past your turn."

A rapid consideration swept its expression across Joe's face.

"Well, then," he said, as he caught hold of the dasher-frame, sprung up, lowered his hat, slid into the vacant place by Algernon, and had the furtive grace to give a sidewise lift to his cap to the ladies upon the back seat. "Might as well save wind, I suppose."

"Who plays to-day?" asked Algernon, not without a certain genial air of comfortable position as he held the clean russet lines in one hand, and lightly flicked the horse's haunches with the whip in the other.

"Oh! not any of the regular nines. But there's sure to be a game of scrub, and some good practice. Unless that cloud means a shower," he added, nodding westward where a pile of beautiful cumuli gave the gentle Jersey landscape a suggestion of far-off mountain grandeur.

"Oh! do you think so?" came Mrs. Laura's voice from behind. Now, Mrs. Laura, sensible woman that she was in other things, had a distinct objection to thunder-clouds, and a slight wavering of mind in regard to horses.

"Oh, no, not yet awhile," answered Joe. "Looks more like going round north, too." He spoke partly man-fashion, as he had heard men answer the timidities of women, and as it suddenly felt fine to do, and partly in result of that same consideration, which might have been observed, had his companions been studying him as we are, to have flickered more than once across his forehead, and to have settled into a kind of half absentness in his eyes.

"Don't borrow any 'lightning or tempest,' mamma, or any of the rest of the tribulations," quoth light-hearted Master Algie, now thoroughly enjoying his command and

his prospect for the afternoon. His mind's eye swiftly glanced toward Sidney again, and beheld him quite cosy and happy, with his charming English story, in the sunny-shady back stoop, and with Celia, probably, for neighboring company, at her window above. He gave his horse another touch with the tasseled lash.

"Oh, don't hurry, Algie, I did n't mean that," said mamma Laura, hastily.

"I never imagined you did, mamma. You're never in a hurry behind a horse. Between a horse and a thunder-storm, you'd stand stockstill." Algernon laughed in the uplifted gayety of his heart.

"Hullo! here we are. Much obliged," said Joe Rabin, the next minute, springing out upon the ground as Algie halted, and waving a salute with his bat. And they drove on, leaving him standing there at Tulick's Corner. Presently they passed a market gardener's wagon, bound in to Broadtop from the Orchards.

If Algernon could have seen Joe Rabin stand still, waiting there; then heard him hail the gardener's team, calling out, "Give us a ride, will yer?" if he had seen him jump to the wagon-front as the man good-naturedly pulled up; if he had heard him say, in answer to the inquiry about a ball-match — "No, 't is n't a field day, and I guess I'll go home;" if he had known that ten minutes afterward he was tossing his bat over his father's fence and starting to make the best of his way up the Slope to the olive-green house — well, I believe he, too, would have been tempted to prophesy a shower, and to advise Mrs. Laura urgently to let him turn the horse and get safe home before it should roll up.

VII.

Now I do not suppose Joe Rabin started for Frost Brothers' with deliberate intent of doing what he did do afterward ; I think he only remembered that Sidney would be left alone in charge, and it occurred to him that it would be a favorable time for a visit. I do not suppose half the blamable things Joe, or anybody else, does, are to be referred to an intention beforehand of the full wrong-doing. But I know that Joe, and a good many of us, turn at the wrong finger-post at many a corner of our lives, and that if the evil to which we so deliver ourselves does not beguile or urge us over any fatal brink, it is not from any rightness or strength or wisdom in ourselves, but from a preventing Goodness that saves us from a further chance and choice.

There is also, it certainly seems, a preventing power in the Evil — whether we put it outside of ourselves as a personality, and spell it with a capital letter or not. For to "prevent" means to "go before," and something does surely often go before, and prepare the way, in a line of opportunity and temptation, for any who once give themselves by a first wrong to such a leading. When Joe Rabin sauntered into the Frosts' back-yard, and presented himself with his usual happened-in-on-privilege air at the little area door, something that he saw quite altered and extended, in his favor as he thought, the circumstances on which he had counted. Sidney, tired with the warm afternoon and with lonely waiting, and having read himself into the sort of quietness that was apt to overtake him now and then since his long illness, had let his book slip from his hands, dropped himself back in the low corner seat behind the counter, and was in the dead middle of a summer afternoon nap ; the more heavy, doubtless, from the atmospheric heaviness that precedes a summer shower.

"Guess I'm boss this time," quoth Joe, inwardly. But he did not dare to whisper it in words, or even to chuckle in a whisper over it. In fact, he did not know, just at first, what advantage he would conclude to take from it. He could look round a bit, at any rate. But what made him slip off his easy old half-boots, and go in stocking-footed across the floor, and behind the leaf? If they had not been those easy old shoes, and if he could not so readily have stepped into them again before Sid could fairly rub his eyes open, he would hardly have done it. He carried them in his hand to the counter-opening, and laid them down noiselessly just outside. Then he changed his mind, picked them up, and took them into the sanctum with him, keeping them in his hand.

"Wonder if they've sold much of their but'nut?" he put to himself, still in the same silent way, as a question. There is as much preliminary and pretext with itself in a mind yielding to a gradual temptation, as there ever has to be between it and another, to cover with an innocent and plausible air the step by step of intent or drift.

Without a word Joe went through the mental process of a cautious conversation, at any point of which, should Sidney wake, he might be prepared to speak out the remark of the moment, and give color to his proceedings.

"Funny way to tend store," he went on. "Might help myself, and leave my money on the counter."

He stopped there, to quietly put on his shoes first; then he lifted and carefully laid off the cover of the tin can.

Certainly the contents were most tempting. The rich, loose, moist, crumbly sugar, with the true maple depth of color, filling more than three-fourths of the tall canister — the thin, curly, veined and shaded butternut-meats showing their tips and flakes generously through the mass; the quantity, from which a few mouthfuls could scarcely ever

be missed ; these were the conditions and allurements in which poor little greedy-mouthed Joe Rabin found himself, as he thought, " boss " of the situation. He was anything but that, miserable little sinner !

He did not even try his pockets for that money which should pay for the " helping of himself." He was careful not to do that, for he knew he could not keep up the fiction to himself if he did. Does this seem an impossible self-lie ? Why, he did not look at the lie, any more than he felt in his pockets, lest he should find out the emptiness that he knew all the while was in it.

But he dipped into the sugar. Pay, or any other consequences, outward or moral, might come after. The roaring Evil that was helping itself in him knew well enough now that it had got him.

And so Joe Rabin first nibbled, picked here and there, keeping a careful level, and then ate on and on, as a boy can of butternut-and-maple, until he suddenly realized that a new moist line, indicating the recent level before he had begun, was traceable around the tin full half an inch above what yet remained.

That stopped him. He would fain have put some in his pockets ; his conversation with himself had gone deeper down and hushed itself more in the depths by this time, and had become a mere wonder as to how much *anybody else* — not he, Joe Rabin, who was supposed to be safe out at Pixley Pasture, and a shower growling and darkening up, too, that might easily keep folks in the nearest shelter a long time yet — might naturally be believed to have eaten, if it was noticed ; and this query got no margin of answer that would include a future supply.

He pulled off his shoes again, and got up. The growl of the coming shower might be a flash and a clap at any minute ; and that would wake Sidney. Thus far, the

darkness had been like a night-soothing, and a cover also for the small deed of darkness.

As Joe lifted himself to his feet, somewhat cramped with his long crouching, the shine of the glass Mason jars caught his eyes, and again his opportunity overcame him. "Might as well be caught for an old sheep as for a lamb," he quoted; the inward talk had grown less compromising now; "can pay up any time;" a bold defiance to what he knew his bad purpose of escape to be; "and — thunder! what a fool I am; Sid might sell no end and pocket the *money*; or anybody might come in while he was asleep!" With this last curious thought-action, which detached himself altogether from the "anybody," and from the whole scrape, Joe, having already lifted the light cover, grasped the "Salem" jar with one hand, hastily plunged its mouth into the top of one of his half-boots, and so inverted, emptied it into the singular receptacle of half its contents. Then, with a sudden panic, not daring to return to the tin can, as a vivid stream of lightning quivered out of the gloomy sky beyond the open doorway, and a peal began that seemed, even to him, something awful in its immediate echo of his own words — he ran noiselessly from the place, not stopping to unload his booty or to reboot his feet, until he turned the corner and could sit down under the outer wall. And here he recollected that he had replaced neither cover — of can or jar — in his hurry. Never mind; it was Sid's lookout; it would n't be tracked to *him*, out at Pixley Pasture; and the storm would bewilder recollection and account for almost anything — except the missing goods.

Innocent little Sid started up, bewildered indeed with that crash of thunder. He was afraid in a storm, and when alone could not deny it to himself. When with Algernon, he borrowed courage; really received it, as we do

receive a virtue we admire and emulate. But now he just jumped and ran for dear life, to find companionship and heartening within the house. At the shop entrance, even in his flight, he recollected. Faithful as Casabianca, he paused under the very glittering of another of those blazes across the clouds, and while trembling through the rattling reverberation that followed, shut the door, turned the big key that under the circumstances he was mortally afraid of, and with a swift valor bore it with him in through the kitchen and up-stairs to his and Algie's sleeping-room, where he flung it far from him upon Algie's bed, and then turned toward the sisters' apartment to find Celia.

Somebody, hurrying up the Hill street over the Slope, caught a strange glimpse of a boy under Mr. Frost's corner wall pulling a handful of some stuff in red and white from an old boot and transferring it to his pocket, after which he put the boot to its proper use and place with some precipitation, sprang to his feet, and was down the hill through the great, scattering bullets of the rain like one possessed, but perhaps only with the inclination to get safe home out of a pelting shower.

"Queer!" thought Mr. Talfrey Ostridge to himself, as he kept on up the opposite sidewalk under his umbrella. "Might have been one of these sanguinary-bordered pocket handkerchiefs. But what the boy should dust out his shoes for, with this coming on" —

At this moment a great gust caught the umbrella and its holder, swirled them fiercely and helplessly round, turned the former inside out, and drove real bullets of sudden hail against the gentleman's broad back and broad-cloth. A terrible glare of lightning and an instant tearing avalanche of thunder came almost simultaneously; and in the struggle with the elements through which Mr. Ostridge gained the Brim and his own dwelling, the

smaller incident of the boy and his boot was temporarily swept from his recollection.

VIII.

Mrs. Frost and Ethelind, with Algie, were kept at the Pine Orchards by the storm until quite after dark. Sidney had had his supper with Celia, and they were playing Logomachy, when Algie, pretty well tired, came back from returning his "team" to the stable. He was not hungry; they had all had a fine tea at the Orchards; so he took his little safety-lamp from the pantry and lit it, to go and give a look to the shop for the night, and then proceed to bed.

"How was trade, Sid?" he asked, rather sleepily, as he leisurely scratched his match at the chimney.

"Cele! you can't build on my word, you know!" just then exclaimed Sidney to his sister.

"That is n't building, Sid, it's altering," replied Celia.

"It's 'prefixing,'" persisted Sidney. "And you said we could n't do that."

"'H O,' before 'nest,' is quite *honest*," laughed Celia, and gathered up the word.

"Don't see how a fellow is going to tell," said Sid. "You would n't let Ethel make 'fairly' from 'fair,' the other night; and then mother went and made 'fairy'!"

"Of course; it was n't a derivation. There might be a question, perhaps, in that case; but it was n't direct; and this is certainly no derivation, or like word, at all. Don't you see?"

"He don't *hear*," said Algernon, screwing down his wick with a little difficulty, and taking up the lamp to go. "How's trade, Sid?"

"Oh! nobody came, and it thundered, and I came away."

"Locked the door?"

"Oh, yes. Key's up in our room."

"Bring away the till?"

"No. Did n't think. Was n't much in it."

"Wish you 'd get the key, then."

"Yes, run; Algie's tired," said Celia. And Sidney ran up-stairs and quickly back again with the key; in a hurry, now that it was his turn, to make "cheats" out of Celia's "eats." "Then that ain't a prefix, either," he said, triumphantly.

It was queer that there were those two words — and the last one made just so — when Algie came in again. He did not look exactly tired, now; there was no sleep in his eyes; he walked up to the table, gave a look, but hardly as if that were what he came for; and asked Sidney once more, "*Nobody* in while I was gone?"

"No, nobody," answered Sid, simply. He did not think of his nap at that moment; in fact, he had not at all realized that he had more than dropped his book — and himself — for an instant, when that sudden darkness and thunder-clap had come.

Algernon looked strangely puzzled; a boy that made no attempt to cover up his tracks better than that might puzzle anybody; he turned round without further remark, and walked off to bed.

The next morning he was up and dressed a good half-hour before Sidney woke. He went down through the kitchen into the shop. Runy presently followed him, and gave him a mail parcel that had come the night before.

"All right this mornin', Boss?" she asked the senior partner, in her jocose Irish way, that yet sounded to Algernon's sensitiveness as if she had some meaning in it. He looked round at her sharply, and spoke as sharply.

"Right? of course it's right. What should be wrong?"

"Ah, who knows? might ha' bin signs o' mice 'r the like — whin the cat's away, ye mind. Er the cat hersilf, aven," returned Runy, with a half offended and mysterious toss of the head. She was not used to short words from Algernon.

Algernon went to work in silence, and Runy departed to mould biscuits and stir oatmeal. Algie opened the mail-parcel, and filled the Salem jar to the top with the new supply that had opportunely come; then he broke up, lightened and evened the butternut maple in the tin can, taking out a little paper bag full which he would carry in to his mother presently. When Sidney came there should not be any manifest necessity for explanation or discovery. Things should not show so plainly as even the boy himself must have expected they would show. He would not have to find his brother out. It should all apparently have got passed by, and covered up. If Sid could have it so — if he would not *have* to tell!

Sid's eyes lit upon the Salem jar when he came in, naturally enough.

"Why, when did you fill that up?" he asked quickly. "When did they come?"

"Last night," replied Algernon, briefly, letting both questions pass as answered with the words that fitted the last, though he hated himself as he did so, for even that accidental prevarication, and for hedging his brother's fault with it. Yet if haste and half-darkness would better account for the escape from reckoning — if Sid would think such a thing good luck, and accept it — oh! what difference did it make? it was all miserable, altogether.

"I'm going to shut up shop to-day," he said, abruptly. "I'm going up to the Basin with Rob Casawarie."

"You said you could n't," said Sidney, wonderingly.

"I've changed my mind," was all that Algernon an-

swered, so that Sidney wondered the more : so much that it left him nothing to say, again, except, forlornly, —

“ You were off all yesterday afternoon. You have n’t gone away from me so much since I had my collection of complaints.”

That phrase, into which they had quaintly condensed Sidney’s involuntary occupation and endurance of the springtime, as if it had been an odd choice, like the gathering together of buttons or stamps, to see how many he could get — touched Algernon with all that lay back of his present trouble, and that seemed put so far away by it. He changed his mind again.

“ I won’t go away from you now,” he said, with something queer in his voice. “ I’ll stick by you, old Sid, anyway. But we won’t keep shop. We’ll begin to build that parlor in the apple-tree.”

Yet all day, though he remained patient and pleasant in their work-play, there was something that seemed to have dampened Algie down. “ He ain’t put out,” Sidney puzzled with himself, anxiously ; “ but he’s kind of *blowed* out.” And something damped down his question, also, when he would, with the old directness, have asked him why.

It went on so, day after day. There was an evident trouble in Algernon’s mind, and a hitch in his life, that nobody could detect the meaning of, or see cause for. Sid, the nearest of all, was most puzzled of all, and most strangely aggrieved. Algie was so queer with him. He did n’t act mad, there had been nothing to be mad about. But there was a way with him, part of the time, like the “ hold-off ” he had with fellows like Joe Rabin ; a kind of “ squirm,” as Sid used to say, “ under the skin,” that he should think anybody might feel, if they did n’t see it. Now, poor little Sid felt it himself. There was

none of the old identification of thought, plan, and interest; the instantaneous turning to each other — for one could n't squirm without the other shrinking away in spite of himself — with every bit of fun, new notion, happening, expectation; poor little Sid found the world all at once different, and could n't think what had made it so. Sometimes Al looked at him suddenly, with a kind of frightened, pitying expression, as he had done when he had the "complaints;" then again it was as if Algie himself was sick of things; he would answer a customer, hand out what was wanted, take the change, or brush it into the till, with that half-disgusted, quite indifferent way, and sit down with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, and go to thinking — thinking — without anything, as Sidney had been used to experience, coming out of it all, of suggestion, purpose, confidence.

"What ails you, Al?" he did ask him, now and then. And each time Algernon only got up, or shook himself a little, or — once — let his arm, as he stretched it out wearily, drop with a kind of pathetic recurrence of old habit across Sidney's shoulders, as he answered, in the word that is but the beginning of a sentence that may not be spoken, "Oh, nothing."

Nothing — that can be helped. Nothing — that I can say to you. Nothing — that may ever be any different. Nothing — that I can bear to own is something! These are the meanings which all we human children hide under our denying "nothings," and put away to endure, to work out, to experience, to treasure, to fear, to hope for, by ourselves.

But this state of things could not last forever. It never does. Nothing turns out to be nothing, and evaporates; or it comes to a head, gets unendurable, brings a crisis, or forces some action which changes everything.

Vacation was drawing to an end. Sidney's long summer had built him up in health, and both the Middies were to return to school. But Mr. and Mrs. Frost were beginning to be anxious lest for Algernon the business which he had made so real a thing of might have too closely replaced his book-work to be good for him. They questioned whether they might not have made a mistake in allowing him so to employ himself as practically to have lost his holidays.

This feeling approached conviction with his father, when one evening he asked Algie, quite casually, how the trial balances were going on. He had not seen one for two or three weeks.

"Have n't made 'em out," was the languid reply.

"Been winding up business in the usual boys' way, eh? eating up balance of stock?"

Now, as there were screws and matches and tin-tacks, pins, needles, soap, and hairpins in that same stock, this was really hard upon a boy's appetite and self-control at once. But the tears need not have come into Algie's eyes for it, and it need not have made him turn so quickly aside from his father's look.

"Anything wrong, my boy?" asked Mr. Frost, anxiously; "or are you only tired, or a little disappointed, or what?"

Algie looked him full in the face, to reply to that; and a half-restrained quiver on his lip was drawn in to firmness. "I don't know, father, so don't ask me," he said. So Mr. Frost knew that there was something, and that he must wait. He respected his son's right to choose his own time.

"Will you just run down to the post-office with this letter?" he asked the boy; but his tone said, "we will leave it now; I'm all ready for you if you want me."

And Algernon's "Yes, sir," had a hearty "thank you" hidden in it.

"And afterward," said his father, "I wish you would go up to Mr. Ostridge's and ask him for that pamphlet he spoke of, if he can spare it. I should like to look at it, and will return it to-morrow."

Algie took the letter and ran off. It was a comfort, after all, to think of his father, who was so kind and wise, and who was Sidney's father as well. The responsibility was not all on his young shoulders. Only — ought he to tell his father this — that really he kept indignantly contradicting to himself, was nothing to tell, after all?

At the post-office he received a letter directed to himself. It was in Mrs. Shatoraine's strong, graceful hand, and was postmarked "Lebanon." This was half a chill, again, and half another comfort. They had had such eager pleasure in Aunt Thankful's letters and coöperation, until now that the good seemed gone out of everything; and yet, again, Aunt Thankful would be coming soon, and she was sure to see and help, without a word said. She would be right into everything.

He walked up to the Brim, and rang at Mr. Ostridge's door, asked for him, and was shown into a little library where Mr. Ostridge entered presently, and he told his errand.

The gentleman left the room to look for the pamphlet, which was in an up-stairs study. While he was gone, Algernon, sitting under the light of a bright gas-drop at the table, opened Mrs. Shatoraine's letter and glanced along over the first page.

"Oh dear!" he exclaimed, softly and bitterly, in a way too much like a man's moan; for his trouble all surged back into his mind with the bright plan the letter proposed and unfolded.

"Pardon me, my boy," said the voice of Mr. Ostridge, behind him. "But why 'oh dear'? no bad news in your letter, I hope?"

With the surprise, the kindness, and the impossibility of explanation, Algernon's throat and eyes filled up.

"No, sir," he struggled to say, for he must say something. "Only something that ought to be jolly — and is n't any more!" It burst forth in spite of him; and in spite of him he ended with a sob, the breakdown of his long, lonely worry.

Mr. Ostridge drew up a chair and sat down beside him. "Perhaps, as I think you know I like you, and am your friend, you will tell me what, and why?" he said, quietly; for Algie's outburst could not be — politely or indifferently — ignored. "Is it business trouble, maybe?" the kind business-man went on. "I am used to that sort of thing, you know."

"It is n't *anything*," Algie asserted, valiantly; "and yet — I'd give the whole shop to know it was n't!"

"Do you mistrust anybody, then?"

When it came to that, Algie stood up, trying to force away his distress again to the secrecy he had kept it in; but like the genie from the casket, it had come forth, and could not be crowded back. At any rate, the fact of trouble could not.

"No, sir. There is n't anybody to mistrust. There's only my brother and I," he said, proudly. And then, in an instant, there was quite enough made plain to Mr. Ostridge.

"Have you investigated?" he asked.

"I *could* n't investigate," was the reply.

"Would you mind, now, just telling me all about it? the mere facts, I mean. I can reserve judgment as generously as you can; and two heads are apt to be better than one; and the other of the two may be the cooler."

"I may as well now," said Algie, gathering himself up. "And because you are my friend, I will. It was one afternoon, weeks ago, when I went with my mother and Ethel to Pine Orchards; and it came on to rain; that big thunder-storm and hail, you know, sir. We were kept away till after dark; and I left Sid in the shop. He does n't know that anybody came in; he *might* have gone out, you know, sir, and left the door unlocked, and not thought anything about it — to tell me. I have n't asked him very much about it."

Algernon spoke eagerly, and looked intently into Mr. Ostridge's face.

"Or he might have gone to sleep," said Mr. Ostridge.

"Why, so he might! I never thought of that — but then, who *was* there? Nobody that ever comes there — that was round that day — would have touched anything."

"Then there were things meddled with?"

"Yes; the maple sugar and butternuts; and the Salem Gibaltars — oh! it sounds so small and mean to care; but it was n't the *things*!"

"I know that," said Mr. Ostridge. "Who was there about the house? Whom do you have in your kitchen? and who might come for company, there?"

"Oh! our Runy would n't pick up loose gold — except to take care of it for anybody it belonged to!" said Algie. "Much less a few dimes or goodies!"

"Have you inquired of her? she might be able to give some evidence. You never know where a clue may be."

"Why, I never inquired of anybody," said Algie.

"And so kept all this to yourself, to worry over? The best way is to face things at once. I advise you to go home and ask Runy if she can remember anything about that day. When you've tried her, come to me again, and

ask Sidney if he thinks he went to sleep while he was in the shop ; or if he left it at all without shutting up. But probably you asked that of him, at first."

"No ; I did n't ask him anything, except if anybody had come in ; and when he said there had n't—it did n't seem any use—and I did n't want—to *make* him tell me anything."

Through all these "anys," hesitated over and then spoken with a sort of determined confidence, as if there could be nothing held back behind them, Mr. Ostridge discerned, with a warm liking and sympathy, the boy's character, and experience in this thing ; and it was a good grasp of the hand, and not an ordinary touch of courtesy, that he gave him, as Algernon rose and said, "Well, good-night, sir, and thank you."

Mr. Ostridge went with him to the door, where he said again, "Just ask, and then come to me. I feel pretty sure you'll get hold of something."

That up-hill walk in the shower had at once recurred to Mr. Ostridge's recollection, when Algernon had said, "That big thunder-storm and hail, you know." And an instantaneous photograph had flashed back with it upon his mental sight, of a boy under the corner wall in the rain, emptying his shoes, and putting a handful of something red and white hurriedly into his pocket.

"It looked like goody-stuff, then ; and I know the boy, and I never liked him ; and for that reason I won't say anything until I see if somebody else does. There's the making in that boy of such a man as the world wants more of," was Mr. Ostridge's soliloquy, as he closed his front door and walked back to his library. And the last words, there is hardly need to say, did not refer to Master Joe Rabin.

IX.

"Runy, do you recollect about that stormy afternoon when I drove out to Pine Orchards?"

"Well, I should just think I might," returned Runy. "Me and Miss Cely our loahn in the house — an' I wish, faith, Madge an' Bobby was back from their wisits an' their rackets — an' the blin's all a slatterin' wid the win' in a minute, an' everythin' to shut up an' shut down afore yer could turn; I guess I recklets it — an' why not indeed?"

"Do you remember anything — well, seeing anybody in about the place or the shop?" Algernon pursued, with the same old shrinking from direct inquiry.

"Ah, ye wants ter know, now, diz ye? Yer might 'a' let me tell ye afore. 'T would be quare if I had n't forgotten by this time; fer 't wa'n't much ter lay up ter min-tion. Only in the time iv it — af ye 'd missed annything — but ye see ye did n't — 't would n't bin me — ner the cat!"

"Runy, I did miss something. Can you help me find out where it went? I don't care for the *miss*; but I'd give a good deal to know — now."

"Well, 't was jist this, thin — ner more ner less," said Runy, stopping in the wringing out of her dish-towel, and regarding him with keen, pleasant eyes; "I'd lift me kitchen tidy, an' gone up te me room, an' was sittin' behin' me ahnin' blin' — the comfort it is te me! in the winder perfectin' over the arey; when what wid I see bu that feller that's sore fer good eyes — Joe Rabin" —

"Why, Runy! it could n't have been! I picked him up out on the Valley Road myself, and took him on to Tulick's Corner, on the way to Pixley, to play base-ball."

"Thin me story's sp'ilt, I s'pose," returned Runy, giv-

ing the final wring to her dish-towel and shaking it out over the chimney line. But tone and toss told of a whole flood of information and of certainty dammed up behind her words.

"Go ahead, Runy. Tell me what you thought you saw. But a fellow can't be in two places at once, you know."

"I know he can't," said Runy, with awful dignity and wisdom. "That 's a *nary-buy*, an' it's agin the law. An' Joe Rabin war n't out at Pixley, the more accordin'. Fer he walked in here, an' down the arey, on his two feet, with his shoes on; an' he kim out awhile after, with his shoes in his hands; jist when we'd got all the blin's in, that was, an' a tarmint thim blessed ahnin' blin's is in a gale an' a hurry; an' I see him — from the spare-room gardin winder — lookin' up an' down the house as he did when he kim in, an' seein' nobody; but there 's alwers eyes set somewhens whin there 's a thing that's set to be seen to; an' the win' roun' the corner took his hat, an' he pit up his han's to grab that in the gateway, an' a thing dropped out iv his shoe, that I don't wonder he could n't put it on comfortable; an' I picked it up arterwards anunder the bushes, an' there 's the highdentikill Sailin' Jibroliter!" And Runy produced from the depths of the match-jar on the kitchen mantel a dusty, lean, rain-melted, air-eaten specimen of the once delicate dainty, and reached it out with a triumph of proof and of probity, to the confounded Algernon.

"But where was Sid?" he asked impetuously. "He did n't sell" — And there Algie stopped, with a reflex wave of the old difficulty and uncertainty at his heart and against his speech.

"Course he did n't. That next thunder-clap was the first thing he'd known fer one good hour — tell me! he kim in on that, an' up-stairs ter me an' Miss Cely, an' he said he believed he'd bin jist droppin' asleep; but it wod 'a' taken

a while ter finish the wakin', if it had n't bin fer the keepin' on o' the lightnin' an' the hail an' the thunder, all ter once an' altergither, I guess! He was no more stiddy on his legs nor a pisoned fly! That's how I seen through the stockin'-footin'. But 't was all right, yer said yerself; an' 'twar n't fer the like'r me to be conterdictin', was it?"

"You're a brick, Runy!" shouted Algie, dropping his long load of mistrust and fear, that had made him old and grave beyond his growth, and turning himself on the instant into a boy again. "You're a solid, no-end, square-cornered, everlasting old brick!" and he seized her second dish-towel away from her, flung it backward over his head upon the kitchen table — as it happened, and caught and shook her two wet hands.

"Don't see what yer so awful pleased at, though," said Runy, regarding him with her keen look again over her shoulder, as she went and picked up her towel. "If yer took up wid thinkin' " —

"I did n't — not for a minute, Runy; don't say it! I only did n't dare to stop to think!" interrupted Algernon.

"Ye was jist desarvin' not to be conterdicted," finished Runy, leaving out the forbidden hypothesis of his thought, and speaking with a quiet provisional scorn. But she had it, as it were, to herself; for Algernon was out and off from the kitchen door.

"Sid! Sid!" she heard him calling. "Where are you? Come along, old boy! Here's a letter from Aunt Thankful, and there's business in it. No end of a jolly old plan!"

But she did not hear or see him, after he had found Sidney, and the two had gone through the letter together, and had discussed Mrs. Shatoraine's brilliant idea of a big twenty-eight pound can of first-rate maple sugar, at

ten cents a pound, to be brought down by her from the country, and to be melted and boiled into real, fresh, rich maple syrup, and bottled for sale to their best customers — at twenty-five cents a bottle — a small lot at a time, as wanted — and when Sid all at once turned from the project to Algie himself, to say, "Why, it's done you lots of good, Algie! I did n't think you were ever going to be glad about the shop again!" she did not hear Algie say — nor see him put his arm round Sidney's neck while he did say it — "I'm glad of everything again! only, I've got something that — Sid! do you think you could forgive me for something without asking me what? because it never really was anything, and I could n't tell you what it was if I tried!"

Sid stared. "I don't see what I have to do with it, then!" he said. "Except it's what's made you kind of grouty and don't-care-ish, lately."

"Forgive that, then."

"So I will," answered Sid, laughing, "now it's over. But it was n't lively while it lasted."

And Frost Brothers went down the shady flagged path under the syringas, to the area steps, and down into the very shop door, with their arms across each other's shoulders.

Algernon walked up to the Brim that afternoon, when the train had been in long enough to allow for dinner-time. Mr. Ostridge came down from the veranda and met him, as he saw him coming up the drive. The gentleman had a half-smoked cigar in his fingers which he threw off into the shrubbery as Algie approached. "I do that out of respect to a boy, as I would to a woman," he has been heard to say. "They can't like it, and we don't want them to like it."

Algernon's bright face told a good story, without a word.

"All comfortable on exchange to-day, eh?" Mr. Ostridge asserted, interrogatively.

"Yes, sir. It's all right — for us, at least. It was a boy — that I need n't tell of — because if it had been some boys I would n't have told of *them* — that came in — stocking-footed, sir! when Sidney was asleep. And he — did n't either beg or buy."

"Pretty much as I expected; stocking-feet and all agreeing. For it was a boy — that I need n't tell of now — that I saw, under your father's garden wall, in the hail, pulling lollypops out of an old shoe," said Mr. Ostridge.

"That day?" asked Algernon, quickly.

"Yes. That afternoon of the unmistakable hail-storm," replied his friend.

Algernon looked intensely satisfied, with a curious shade of puzzle.

"It's all as clear as Q. E. D.," he said, "except one impossible part, *unless* you and I saw different boys, and Runy was mistaken. The boy Runy says — and I should think, only for this — went out to Pixley's; I took him up myself, and set him down at Tulick's Corner less than an hour before."

"The boy I mean came in on Semple's wagon from the Orchards, half an hour before," returned Mr. Ostridge, coolly matching query with information, as if armed and equipped beforehand, as the closest law-evidence might require. "I was at the market-house when they drove up. The man came in; he had some late sweet corn and some fine melons, I remember; the boy went up the hill like a rocket — I have a habit of noticing things, you see. And I find they get docketed and put away, so that they are usually on call if wanted."

"I'm awfully glad, Mr. Ostridge!" said Algernon, so glad that he had not another word to say.

"So am I," said the gentleman. "But it's queer of us both; for there's somebody in fault, you see, anyway. The bad thing is n't shoved out of the world."

"I know. I've thought of that," said Algie, slowly. "But dirt has to go somewhere," he added, brightening suddenly; "only we want to sweep as clean as we can round us!"

Mr. Ostridge laughed heartfully. "Very good! You keep on sweeping — for a few years longer — and I guess you'll find you've made a place to stand in! — And look here," — as Algernon was raising his hand to his cap and taking a step as if of departure, — "remember I'm your business adviser. Come to me when you want anything that I can say, or do."

And the two shook hands, then, as friend with friend, and said good-by.

That very evening, Algernon brought a somewhat long and intricate paper to his father. It was a balance sheet for three weeks. There was one item in it set down thus:

9 Salem Giblaltars,23
Butternut-maple, ab't $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.15
	<hr/>
	.38

In the balance it was offset with —

Riddance of rubbish, and finding friend . <i>cheap</i> .	.38
--	-----

He waited till his father came to that, resting his finger upon the unusual entry, and looking up with a smile — and then told him the whole story.

"It's all the trouble I ever had, father — and it was n't any — and I'm out of it," he said, with delightful contrariety.

"Why did n't you come to me with it sooner?" asked Mr. Frost.

"Because — it was n't anything, you know — and — I did n't want you into it!" With which clinging to his paradox, and the inevitable laugh from his father that ended none the less with a look of loving gravity quite as paradoxical, the subject was dismissed, or nearly so.

"What shall you do about — the person whose name we are not to mention? You can't have him coming about the place, I should think?" Mr. Frost inquired and suggested.

"Oh, he won't come now, I guess!"

"I'm not sure," returned his father. "They say if you *lend* to a rogue you are rid of him; but if he helps himself, I should think he might — not dare *not* to come back again."

Algernon perceived, and considered, rather anxiously. Presently he said, with a half-comic twinkle, "I wonder if I had n't better leave it to Runy?" and Mr. Frost thought it would be an excellent way to do.

Mr. Frost was right.

Joe Rabin had been off, camping out for several weeks, with some other boys from the village. When he got back, he let nearly another week go by without making an appearance at the Olive-colored House. Then, under the working of the very reason foreseen, he loitered sneakingly along, one quiet afternoon. The boys were in the shop, and Algie saw the bob of his old hat in good time, behind the garden wall. He slipped round into Runy's pleasant kitchen, on the slope side, and said, "Now, Runy, please; you're wanted. It's your nary-buy!"

So Runy clapped an iron she was testing back upon the stove, put something from the shelf into her pocket, and started forth.

She met Joe Rabin on the flagged walk.

"So it's *yees* that's back ag'in?" she accosted him,

planting herself full across his way, with one hand on her hip and the other in her pocket.

Joe looked at her, and stopped. What would otherwise have been mere impertinence took a possibly quite different character in the apprehension of the something in him that had failed to be a conscience, and merely developed into a dread of manifestations.

He attempted a poor little cowardly laugh. "What of it?" he asked, and pulled down the bucket of retribution upon his head with that string.

"It's only that I've bin a watchin' fer yees, ter give yees back phat ye dropped, *out o' yer shoe* — the last time ye was over," said the Irish Nemesis, more broadly Irish than ever with her warmth. "I'm honest — I am; I've kep' it safe — barrin' dust an' flies — an' there ye've got it!"

And the Sailin' Jibroliter struck straight against the covetous lips, as Runy tossed it, not violently, but with utterest contempt, full into Joe's mean and frightened face.

"And I'd *advise* yees," added the good woman, "ter tek it an' go! av yees'll lit Frasht Brithers aloahn, it's they'll lit *yees* aloahn. An' av ye'll kape the shoes an yer fate, an' yer han's from the pickin' an' sthtalin' — mebbly the Lard'll hev mercy himsel' an the bit av a shole ye've got lift!"

It was like the hanging sentence; Joe Rabin went away with it, without a word. Let us hope it did him good — or may do him good, for there is time yet — somehow. That somehow the hanging by the neck may have been for the choking of the evil thing in him, and that the soul that had got so much to struggle through may, of very shame and self-contempt, have begun its struggle upward there and then, toward the forgiveness and saving that are waiting, always.

But we will not say good-by with the hanging sentence. There are pleasanter words to add before we can quite shut up our story-shop.

That same evening, while they were all at the tea-table, a carriage was driven up and stopped at the door. The whole family was together again, Madge and Bobby having long since returned from their visit. The dainty table, with Mrs. Laura beaming motherly at the head, was set round with happy faces; and bright, gay sentences and laughs rang back and forth, as the day's varying histories and results and comparisons were exchanged over this cheeriest of family meals. But the brightness and gayety had been as nothing to what flashed and resounded when, after that stop of wheels and ring of the bell, steps were heard coming right on through the parlor, and Aunt Thankful, with the same old jolly girl-face as ever — the boys said afterward — stood smiling in the archway under the portière; her tall, handsome husband behind her, a little way back. They had not been here since that Christmas-time two years ago.

Was n't there room made quickly, though, beside the long, bright-covered board? Were n't there hot muffins brought in, and fresh-brewed tea, and more cocoa for Aunt Thankye, in the little decorated morning-glory pot? And did n't Runy's face grow broad with smiles and stay so, as she fetched the things, and Mrs. Shatoraine spoke to her with quick, friendly gladness at still finding her there? "An' where shud I be but where I knows I'm sah wull aff?" she answered, in full Green - Erinish, to the pleasant words.

Mrs. Raynald Shatoraine was not one of those grown-up people — not even now that she was married — who must get over and through with all the grown impatiences and delights and news, before she could take thought

for the children, or let their little eagernesses in. She did not say, "wait awhile;" she did not even wait until they ventured in with their small interests. It was, "How goes the shop, Middies?" before she had buttered her muffin, or stirred her cocoa-cup.

And then did n't there pour forth the satisfactions and successes — the hopes and plans — the thanks, and invitations of "come and see!" And next morning, before she had unpacked her trunk — except to pull out, to the great confusing of her own neat parcels and foldings, certain packages with names upon them, from Ethelind's and Celia's to Bobby's and Madge's and Miss Runcina O'Hallahan's, for which she would not keep them waiting — the minute Mr. Shatoraine was off for New York with his step-brother-in-law, Aunt Thankful was down in the basement, and behind the counter; and a big box was opened, and the tall, square tin of real, pure, sirupy maple sugar was uncovered and tested, gauged and estimated, and pronounced a "bully lot," and an A 1 investment.

"There's a clear two-fifty profit in it," quoth the head Middy, with a dignified delight.

"Have you settled what to do with your profits?" asked Aunt Thankful.

"Oh, we have n't come to any great need yet," said Algernon. "We keep it right along in stock, mostly; or ready to buy with. But when all this sugar's sold out, and other things that take up capital, we shall have to think, I suppose."

"First, you will each have a right to an income," suggested Aunt Thankful, nibbling a "Salem," as she sat on a cracker-keg.

"Well, yes. Only we've had all the fun we could have bought anywhere, out of the shop itself; and we have n't cared for allowances. But I s'pose we shall come to want things."

"Especially at Christmas," said Aunt Thankful. "Would n't Thanksgiving be a good time to divide? You see you are coming to spend that with me at the Evergreens," she added, in a quite *dégagé* way; "and we could talk it all over then, and the Christmas plans beside."

For an instant the Middies were mute, staring. Then the acclamation broke forth, Aunt Thankful innocently nibbling on, until the nibbling became a danger of choking, under the sudden hugs and capers of Frost Brothers, whose sober business partnership suffered momentary dissolution into one of ecstatic surprise and simple little-boy-jollification.

"Who said that?" asked Middy Number Two, subsiding, and doubtful of so much blessedness being consented to and settled.

"I said it, to mamma Laura, last night." And Mrs. Shatoraine put the last bit of her Gibraltar between her pretty teeth, with the air of one accustomed nowadays to get her way, and eat the sweets of life, without dispute.

"Stick to it, won't you, Aunt Thankye?" cried Algie. "Stick to it, like a brick — and mortar! — But" — he added, suddenly bethinking — "the Thanksgiving trade!"

"Oh, that'll be over," said Mrs. Shatoraine, "and all the good people baking their last pies and stuffing their turkeys. You're not to leave till Wednesday; and you're to stay till Monday."

"You've said all that, and not been contradicted?"

"Every bit; and not a word," answered Mrs. Shatoraine, categorically.

In fact, it had all been put through both houses of Domestic Congress, and passed without a veto. Aunt Thankful had been planning it for some time in her mind, and had asked it right off on the enthusiasm of arrival

and privilege of welcome, as she knew how to ask thing. Mrs. Laura had as good as yielded overnight, and had presented the idea to her husband in the morning. He had pronounced at once that it would be just the thing for the little fellows, who, each in his different way, would be the better for a brief change.

And the month's time they had to think of it in, and make plans for it, and say daily to each other how jolly it would be — especially the journey on their own responsibility — was by no means the least part of the pleasure and benefit.

"We must leave the shop open Wednesday, anyhow," said Algernon. "Everybody'll be forgetting lots of things till they come to the last spicings and stuffings. Who'll sell for us?"

"Win Trupeare," said Sidney.

And so Win Trupeare did; with Rob Casawarie to help him; and they shut up shop at four in the afternoon, returning key and till and memorandum of sales to Mrs. Frost; and the memorandum was duly forwarded to Norchester according to arrangement, so that the boys got it on Friday at the Evergreens; making out the full return of their fall trade, up to the lull that was sure to come between Thanksgiving and Christmas. So they sat down by the beautiful big library fire, and talked it all over with Mrs. Shatoraine.

"We've made fifteen dollars and sixty cents, counting everything," said Algernon. "The butternut-maple was clear profit, you know; and the syrup's all sold; and our peanut candy and cornballs have gone first-rate. Yes — we've got that, net!"

"How much do you each expect to draw, regularly, as income or salary?"

Algernon considered. Sidney sat by, listening. He

was not the financier of the firm. And Algie himself had not thought to a decision on these points, yet. They had thus far been content to put in, for the most part. Their weekly allowances had given the most pleasure in this way.

"If we are to have our ten cents a week — both of us — it would take pretty near half the average profit. We sha'n't always have Shaker windfalls, or Thanksgiving trade, you know."

"Well, then, say five," said Sidney.

"We can put it in again if we want to."

"Of course," said Aunt Thankful. "But it represents what grown-up business men have to take out to support their families. You must think what you are pretty sure to need, one way or another, and allow that."

"Well, say five cents a week," said Algernon. "That's — ten times twenty-three weeks — two dollars and thirty cents out."

"Leaving thirteen dollars and thirty cents."

"Yes."

"Now, how much capital do you mean to keep in your business — represented by stock on hand? How much have you in stock now?"

Algernon referred to his papers.

"We're pretty well sold out, now," he said. "Have n't but about three and a quarter, I guess."

"Suppose you say five dollars, then?"

"All right. That takes one-seventy-five to make it out."

"Leaving eleven-fifty-five. Now you can either divide that profit or increase your business with it."

"We can't do much more, I guess, than five dollars' worth will keep going. And here's Christmas. Only — that's a good time to sell, too!"

"Suppose you put in five-fifty-five for Christmas stock, then? that will leave six dollars to divide."

"All right. And some Christmas things will come out of the shop, at the time, if we like."

"Exactly. Now, one more thing. Have you ever thought of the 'tithe'?"

"What's that?"

"The tenth part of the increase; that the old Hebrews, and Christians since, have given back — somehow — to the Lord."

"How?"

"To the priests — and the preachers — in the first place; so that there might always be priests or preachers to feed the people with the truth, and make that to increase in the earth."

"Is that what they put into the plate at church?" asked Sidney. "And must we put in a tenth of ours?" asked Algernon.

"Some people might tell you so. But I should n't say exactly that. For one thing, your father, as the head of a family, and as a grown, responsible, property-holding or property-earning man — does his share; as you will do yours when you take your place as a man among responsibilities. But even so, things are different, I think, from what they used to be when tithes were the law. Then, the clergymen were not only the preachers, but the alms-dispensers, and the physicians; charities and healing were done through them. Now, there are other ways; work and needs that must be met by individual men and their consciences. Besides, in the old Jew-tithes themselves, out of the tenth — the universal contribution — that was paid to the Levites, whose business was to minister generally, a tenth of that again was all that was given to the priests — the altar ministers. So I think we might, some-

times, out of our tenths, give a tenth-tenth — or hundredth — to the parish plate, provided we know good and urgent use, in the way of personal help to others, to which we are specially called, for our nine other parts of the tithe. And provided, too, that we do not forget about the ‘first-fruits,’ and the ‘free-will,’ and the ‘thank-offerings,’ according to our opportunities. But that is my way of reckoning. I am only sure of one thing — that the Lord wants as much, at least, as the tenth of *all* our power — our time, and thought, and sympathy — as well as of our money; and that while we do one thing, we are not to leave the other undone. — Now that is long enough for a sermon; I’ve only preached it because it is thank-giving, and thank-offering, time.”

“And I say it’s good,” answered Algernon, thoughtfully. After which, he sat silent a minute or two. When he began again, it was to say:

“I think we ought to begin at the eleven-fifty-five.”

“As the increase?”

“Yes. The six dollars is only what we have left after we have put in all we want to make more money with.”

“I think you’re right.”

“A tenth of that is a dollar fifteen cents and a half; say, a dollar and twenty. Look here! our capital’s made up of increase, any way. We did n’t have five dollars to start on.”

“Very true.”

“We’ve got to go back to the thirteen-thirty.” Algie had pencil and paper in hand, and the fresh calculations were before him.

“If you think so.”

“A tenth of that, then, is a dollar and thirty-three. And the tenth-tenth is thirteen cents and three mills. Say fourteen cents — seven apiece — for the contribution. There’s a dollar nineteen for somebody. Who?”

"I know of somebody whom a dollar-nineteen — or a dollar — would set up in business."

"A boy?"

"Yes. Here in Norchester. Simmy Farne; whose father was a brakeman, killed on the railroad. He wants to sell morning papers round here, at people's houses, before the gentlemen get to the post-office and the station. The railroad people would bring them out to him on the six o'clock train. And if he had a little capital, he could peddle other things — such as people come to your store for. He's a bright boy; he would know how to 'suit the market.'"

"Good for you, Aunt Thankye! that's *jolly-good*! I'd like to set another boy up. The dollar-nineteen belongs to him; don't it, Sid?"

Aunt Thankful leaned over, as if to look at the penciled memorandum. Doing so, she let her arm fall gently across Algie's shoulders. Algie was too old — too manly — to be kissed and praised. She only said:

"You've found another principle of business. Setting your own increase to the increase of ways and work for others. But I think Simmy Farne will soon be able to pay you back. He will only want it as a loan; which is the best way."

Algie looked a bit disappointed at first. Then he brightened, and said:

"Well, it'll only come back to get another with it, maybe, and start round again, somehow."

"As the rain does," said Aunt Thankful.

Now, we must say good-by, for the present at any rate, to our Middies. We leave them in a clear decision as to the final principle of their business life — the righteous disposal of the increase. If it ever puzzles business men,

I think it must be only because they have lost the faculty for seeing things as "the children" see them. I do not think Algernon Frost will find himself in the dark, if he should live to be fifty years old, and to handle millions. For it has been surely said that he who has been faithful over small things will be fit to be ruler over many things; and shall be made ruler over them.

Possibly — for all things are possible, though all things are not promised that are possible — we may sometime look in together at the Olive-colored House again.

THE LITTLE SAVAGES OF BEETLE ROCK.

THEY were not Red Indians. They were only the two children of Mr. Cyrus Savage, farmer, who lived away up in one of the middle counties of Maine. They were eleven and a half, and ten years old; girl and boy; names, Catharyne and Luther. Catharyne was spelt with an "i;" but it was pronounced with a "y;" and as it was seldom spelt, and often pronounced, and that with a long leaning or a smart emphasis, I decide to spell it as it was spoken.

They were not christened in honor of the great Protestant reformer and his wife; I don't think Mr. and Mrs. Savage knew much about *them*; though distantly, no doubt, through old Puritan usage, the boy's name had come down to him from the monk of Wittenberg, in about the same sense that Adam's sin had reached him from Eden.

In the middle of the Savage farm that had been in the family for generations ran a quick little riverlet. I do not misspell that word either. A *rivulet* is but a trickle; a brook is not big enough for what I mean. It was almost a *river*, of consequence enough to be put on the map; but as it never was, and was only called Moosewood Run until it found the Penobscot, I say it was a riverlet. In the middle of this stream reared up Beetle Rock, a roof-like ridge of cleft and jagged stone, at top; a precipice, clean and straight, on the north side; on the south, a gradual fall of broken slopes and shelves, on one of which,

near the base, the farmhouse stood, bright red against the gray and green. Put there because that was the only bit upon the property where nothing could be raised but a house.

The Savages had a few books; some old novels that were "Grandma's" in her youth; two or three "poetry books;" the children's Readers and Arithmetics; and a stray half dozen of modern stories and pamphlets, sent within a year or two by some Portland cousins when they had happened to think of the young folks growing up on Beetle Rock.

Catharyne read these books out loud, over and over, to Luther, as they sat in their "pulpit," a great roomy hollow in the very crest and between what people called the "horns" of the "Beetle-head;" overlooking from behind high, rough parapets, safely as from tower windows, a splendid view of hills and meadows.

Lately, they had got hold of Jules Verne's "Mysterious Island," a wonderful, intensified and "progressed" "Family Robinson;" the Swiss pastor's story having been the familiar of their first hardest spelling, and their continued and tireless delight.

They had not so much to wish — for or away — as ordinary children who take the Crusoe-craving.

"'Cause we're on an island now," said Catharyne.

"If't wa'n't for the old bridges," said Luther, with contempt. "Swiss Family did n't have a bridge to land both ways, with board gates on the ends to keep the chickens in and the skunks out!"

"Well, the old castles had bridges, and gates. Let's play it's an old castle."

"Hngh! With ma hangin' out clo'es on the door-flat, an' Cale Spellick carryin' the swill-pail over-east to the barns, an' nobody else here but jest you an' me! There

ain't any old castle nor yet mysterious island about that!"

"There ain't any about a bundle of printed leaves, either," said Catharyne, tossing over the curled and tumbled sheets of the newspaper edition of Jules Verne. "You have to make believe, anyway. If you want it all real, you 'll have to go to sea and get shipwrecked."

"Well, that's what I mean to do," said Luther, stoutly. At which Catharyne got frightened in her conscience at having put it in his head, and said pacifyingly:

"We can play it when ma ain't here, and there ain't any washing nor swill, and there won't be next week when pa and she go to Uncle Mark's. Cale Spellick's wife is going to make cheese and take all the milk; and you and I and Miss Rebecca won't make any swill — to notice."

"Poh! Cale 'll be round and the pigs 'll be fed, all the same; 'an Miss Rebecca 'll jest spoil the whole! Why can't she stay at home an' leave us to ourselves? It might be something, with only you an' me, an' the cats an' the hens, an' Rover!"

"We need n't see *her* much. She 'll be sewing in the east room when she ain't getting the victuals. I s'pose I *shall* have to wipe dishes," Catharyne admitted, with some ruefulness.

"An' I shall have to pick up chips. An' we shall have to eat meals, an' go to bed, an' *mind*! So, there ain't any desert island about it, an' you can't make any!"

"Well, we 'll see," said Catharyne, quoting her mother. "'T ain't Monday yet; and there's time for consid'able to happen." Catharyne's chief mission and anxiety, in those days, was the truly feminine one of endeavoring continually to persuade her own little malcontent masculine that his bit of life was worth the living. And it never occurred to her, any more than it does to some of her elders, to throw up the responsibility.

On Monday, bright and early, the country wagon was at the door; its one broad, low-backed seat covered with a brown bearskin, and the portmanteau and luncheon-basket comfortably stowed beneath. Behind was a folded blanket for the children to sit on, and their little bundles, in checked wraps, were already in; for "consid'able" had happened, as Catharyne foretold, and it had ended that she and Luther were to ride as far as the foot of Biram's Hill with their father and mother, and then trot up with their bundles to Miss Rebecca's house, where they were to stay during the three or four days of their parents' absence. Once in two years, Mr. and Mrs. Savage made this visit to Uncle Mark's, over in Peru; and in the alternate years Uncle Mark and Aunt Myra came to Beetle Rock. It was pleasant fall weather, between the early and late harvestings; the time generally chosen for these trips.

Miss Rebecca Biram had sent word on Friday that her sister Lucy had a nice chance to go to Bangor, and she could n't bear to disappoint her; and that it would n't do to leave the old lady alone with her rheumatism; so she wanted the children to come and pass the time with her instead of herself taking charge at the Savage farmhouse. Mrs. Savage had replied that unless they concluded to leave them with the Spellicks, closer by, they should come along on Monday. If they did n't, she would know the reason. And then it turned out that Cale Spellick came in on Sunday night to say that Hannermatildy was just coming down with something that might be the measles; and so it was settled in favor of Miss Biram's plan. Between these two alternatives, as between two right-angled forces, it came to pass that a diagonal was taken by the children themselves.

It was in both their heads before they started. Catha-

ryne was eager to try housekeeping on her own account ; for she had begun to feel herself too old to have Miss Rebecca called in when her mother went away ; and Luther was possessed with the mysterious island idea, and the longing to shipwreck himself ; so far, at least, as detaching himself from all grown-up aid and comfort, and making a Juan Fernandez or a Fortune Island of his home, which it was his good luck should be a water-washed cliff, all ready to his hand. It was just as good, he reasoned, that "the folks" should go away and leave Beetle Rock to them, especially if they did n't know it, as that they themselves should run off and get cast away on some other rock. Or, if not quite so real a thing, they could make it do, seeing that this was their present chance, and not the other.

It was in both their heads ; but they could not make a deliberate conspiracy of it, and agree to carry out the pretense with their father and mother of the Monday morning setting off and being left at Biram's Hill. They could not so have played the hypocrite before each other's honest little faces. So they did not even resolve ; but let themselves think only how nice it would be. Which is the first step, always, to any conspiracy or iniquity whatever.

They took their little checked bundles in their hands, and said good-by, and stood in the dusty wheel-ruts, watching the wagon as it dropped from sight over the first long dip and water-bar of the steep road beyond ; for Biram's Hill was a long spur, which the highway crossed low down, although over a sharp ridge, high up on which, to the left, above a thick maple grove, stood the dwelling ; and deep to the right lay the hollow of Moosewood Run, half a mile away.

They began to walk up under the maples, crossing two water-bars before they spoke. Then they stopped short,

partly to rest, and partly because each was longing, and but half daring, to say something. Luther sat down on a stone and took a bit of gravel out of his shoe. Then he picked up a stick and began to switch off the heads of the golden-rods that grew thick about him. A quick, rumbling noise sounded in the hollow.

"That's over Alden's Bridge," said Luther. "We could go home that way, any time. It's only down through the orchard and the medder mowin' to the cross-road."

"I wish ma had left us at home, and we had n't got to come here at all," said Catharyne.

"I know what *you're* thinkin' about!" said Luther, looking up at her sharply, and trying not to laugh.

"'Cause you're thinkin' of it too! Miss Rebecca don't know we're coming. If it wa'n't a kind of playin' truant, we might go home and spend the day, and see how it would seem, all alone. I'd make turnovers."

"Poh! Who ever heard of turnovers the first thing? They always find turtles' eggs, and lobsters, and — and — cocoanuts."

"They don't say what they'll find beforehand. They find what there is there. And *we'd* have to. There's bantams' eggs. And they always have some kind of a wreck to go to. We'd have the house."

Luther looked dubious. He was afraid his sister would get too much out of the wreck. He wanted a real, wild, desert-island play; and he suspected the truth that Catharyne would rather make believe at civilized housekeeping. Only cocoanuts did not grow on Beetle Rock,—nor much of anything else, except lichens and a few cedars, and two great white pines that made a pleasant spicy shade.

"We could get in at the back buttery window," said Luther.

"Yes ; but the kitchen door would be hooked."

"Goody !" cried Luther. "The *butt* is all we want." He had never heard of the Scotch "but and ben ;" he only stumbled on precisely what he meant. He did not wish that Catharyne should find it possible to go "ben" the house, and live anything like parlor-fashion.

While they talked, they had crossed the broken wall, and were walking down the orchard and through the stubbly mowing.

"Where should we sleep?" asked Catharyne.

"There's corn-husks in the shed-chamber," said Luther. It was settling itself, as many grown-up plans do, in the talking over. The shoulds and woulds turn into the wills and shalls, by the mere considering.

They went over Alden's Bridge, and came into the "near wood-lot." Beyond this, along the Run, lay the east pasture, which was the land on the side opposite to that upon which they had left it by the road toward Biram's Hill. They came round cautiously ; heard Cale Spellick calling to his oxen down by the Pine Bend, on the west bank, and slipped unseen across the bridge from the barns to the farmhouse. It was getting late ; the forenoon had well worn on ; they were beginning to be hungry, after their early breakfast, their ride, and their long walk.

The house looked very still and lonesome, with shut doors and blinds. The lazy crawl-crawl of the hens, walking about the door-flat with high, slow, curving steps, as if they lifted their feet over a log every time, only added to the repose and the stillness.

"Well," said Luther, as they came round between the blank rock behind and the buttery window, "we're cast ashore. And we've got to live round here, out of sight ; 'cause those bridges look as if savages went back and forth over that end of the island."

"So they do," answered Catharyne, simply assenting. But Luther took her up for what had occurred to himself as he spoke.

"I did n't mean that," he said, impatiently. "You don't make believe worth a cent, Ryne. You ain't to *know* anything. We've just got to guess, and to look out."

"I said it *looked* so," explained Ryne.

"Oh!" apologized Luther. "I hope the buttery shutter is n't fastened."

"How do you know it's a buttery? And if it is, you can poke the hook with a stick."

Luther accepted the suggestion of the second sentence, disregarding the retort of the first. A flat chip passed easily behind the warped board of the rough shutter, and lifted the iron hook from the staple. They raised the sash, and climbed in over a broad shelf.

"People have been here, sometime," suggested Ryne. "And left these things. I'm glad there are some tin pans."

"And this is a good hut," said Luther, approving and consenting to the myth. "But I'm glad there is n't any more of it."

Ryne looked into a stone jar.

"I thought there might be some doughnuts here," she said.

"You're thinking a great deal too fast," rebuked Luther.

"Only because folks *do* keep doughnuts in stone pots."

"Doughnuts! These folks have been gone years and years!"

They might have been, for anything of cookery left behind to spoil, by the thrifty housewife.

"I thought the house was the wreck," said Catharyne, "and we'd got to find things in it."

"Well, it ain't. It's a hut. And if we find anything from a wreck, it's got to be along on the rocks by the water."

"I guess we'd better go and look, then," said Catharyne; "for I'm getting awful hungry;" and as she spoke, there was a sound of rustling paper.

"You go first," said Luther, from the shed-room within. "I'll come presently. I'm going to explore up this ladder."

"Oh Luther! There's" —

"Hush up! There ain't. Not as you know of."

"Must I get out of the window, or can I go through the shed-door?"

"If there's a door, you'd be a goose not to go through that."

"Well, I've found one," said Ryne, comfortably, as Luther disappeared overhead through the trap.

Luther did not arrive until ten minutes afterward at the base of the high, straight face of the great crag. He found his sister settled among the boulder stones, with a paper bag of crackers, and a big corner of cheese. "There were *these* washed ashore," she said, calmly offering him some, crisp and fresh out of the rattling package. "If you don't think, Luther," she added, timidly, "that we're telling *too* big" —

"We ain't telling anything. It's telling itself. It's a story. And a story has to be — a kind of t'other. T'other's always a story, you know. But come round here, and see what I've got. I've stowed it away behind the rocks."

Ryne stepped round, and saw, rolled up into a cranny, a cylindrical tin case; which she carefully pretended not to recognize.

"That's something *like* a thing from a wreck!" Luther

exulted. "None of your paper bags. I'm going to open it with my knife."

"Perhaps it's gunpowder," suggested Ryne, with an excessive loyalty to fiction; and looked on intently, while he loosened the rim of the cover.

"It's good, prime sugar," said Luther, dipping in and bringing up some on the knife-blade. "Maple sugar, and half full! And the next thing I find is going to be — what goes good with maple sugar!"

He could not resist the full glory at once, though he could "find" only one thing well at a time. Ryne stayed on the "beach," as he bade her; and in ten minutes more he was round the jut again dragging a bag of butternuts. They made a fine dinner, with their biscuits and new sage cheese, and their nuts, cracked upon the stones, and the meats mixed with the soft, scraped sugar. How it would do for tea and breakfast and dinner again, remained for them to try.

"I've concluded," said Luther, with the air of a Father Family Robinson, as he also concluded his butternuts, "that we ain't on the real island at all. This is a rock in the mouth of the river, and the big island is each side of us. If it was n't that savages must have made those bridges, and we might meet 'em, the best thing would be to go over and explore. We might find some fruit-trees."

"Yes. We might get some September sweetings."

"What do you name things for, before you find 'em?" added Luther, indignantly. Ryne was like Mrs. Flintwinch; she was always seeing something she had no business to; and her "Jerry" was always making her fling her apron over her face.

"Well," she answered with feminine invention, "I can't help thinking of things we used to have at home."

"That's all right enough," said Luther, indulgently. "Baked sweetings *would* be good, would n't they?"

"If you'd only let me discover a kitchen and a stove," pleaded Ryne.

"You'd want to discover a whole town, next; and North America; besides making a smoke and letting the savages discover *us*!"

"Why should n't we want to discover what there *is* when we can't do without it?"

"Because we don't want other people's fixings. We want to fix for ourselves," answered Luther, with all the independence of his namesake, or even of a modern Radical.

"Well, you'll be glad enough to get back to it," said Ryne. "And I don't believe you'd stay here a minute, if you did n't know it was there all the time, just for turning round!"

"I wish we had Family Robinson to read, anyway," Ryne began again. "We shan't know what to do, cooped up here." They had gone back, now, into the shed, and climbed to the chamber, and were spreading out the corn-husks to make a sleeping-place. Ryne pulled down a dusty "comforter" that hung on an old frame in a far corner. Something made her exclaim a little, suddenly, as she did so; but she checked herself, and Luther did not notice, as he was ransacking among some barrels.

"Here's corn!" he cried. "Left by the folks that built the hut; a whole barrel full."

"And I believe my heart it's pop corn!" said Ryne, coming over. "See here! May I discover anything I please that I really never knew before?"

"Of course," allowed the Autocrat.

"Even if I get at something I *did* know?"

Luther did not want to commit himself too far.

"I — think's — likely. If you really find 'em, new, and don't start after 'em." Which was pretty liberal for a Radical.

“Well, you go ashore, and find — bread-fruit, or something; and I’ll be Mother Robinson, and surprise you when you come back. Like’s not, I’ve got an Enchanted Bag, too! I’ve got a bundle, anyway; and I’m going on an expedition!”

“Only don’t you expedish any finding of us out,” said Luther; and he picked up an old rusty hatchet that lay among the barrels, flung it over his shoulder for effect, and backed down the little ladder stairway.

When he came back, he had eggs in his hat, and sweetings, and redstreaks, and sugar pears in his pockets. Catharyne, on her part, produced from her bundle — the checked bandanna bundle that had held her little changes of clothing for four days — a tin spoon, a bunch of matches, a salt-sprinkler, two small tin dippers, and the Swiss Family Robinson.

“You’ve been through that kitchen-door!” charged Luther.

“I haven’t,” said Catharyne. “I’ve found a mysterious passage, in the shed chamber — behind the — arras; and it led down to a — subterranean — caboose. I could make a fire there, and cook an omelette with your eggs.”

“I tell you the smoke ’ud show,” reiterated Luther. “Lemme see where you’ve ben.”

Ryne lifted up the end of the old comforter which she had hung on the frame again, and showed behind it a little door formed by a couple of boards that were set on hinges in the partition, and came easily open by a slight prying with the fingers, which a projecting edge invited. Beyond was a large closet full of boxes, pillows, blankets, and bundles of sweet herbs that hung upon the walls. An old cradle stood across their entrance, and a great roll of rag carpet leaned up in it against one side of the opening. The hook that had secured this rough door on the

inside had got lifted from the staple in some handling of this same bundle, perhaps ; at any rate, it had not been fastened. They climbed around and over, and opened an opposite door, which led into a low bedroom ; and down from this ran an open flight of bare, unbalustered stairs. These came out into the dark, still, neat little kitchen. Of course the children knew all these precincts, though they had a queer sense, now, of coming to them in a dream.

"I never knew in all my life" — began Luther, and stopped.

"The big old meal-chest used to stand" — Ryne's word was interrupted by Luther's hand across her lips.

"This is Captain Nemo's kitchen," he said seriously. "We've got down into the Nautilus. It was n't *all* blown up, you see."

Ryne looked round at the familiar mops and broom, hanging by the woodshed door, — at the tin dipper laid across the waterpail on the drain-board of the sink, at her mother's little kitchen rocking-chair, with its red cushion, by the garden window, and her splint stocking-basket on the broad sill, — and felt something odd in her heart or her throat that would not quite let her swallow this last figment with ease and relish.

"I guess we'd better go back," she said. "I'd rather make believe in the shed chamber."

They read Family Robinson awhile, and then the long day began to darken into twilight. They ate some crackers, apples, and pears, and lay down, tired enough, upon their beds of husks, with pillows and blankets from the clothes-closet, that made them sufficiently comfortable as to outside. Ryne cried before she went to sleep, but very softly ; she would not have let Luther know it on any account, — she being the oldest. He would have been sure to say it was because she was only a girl.

Early in the morning they made a fire of chips on the "beach," in an angle of the great precipitous rock, and there cooked a curious breakfast, quite screened from view at this point by the straight rising walls upon the shores. For —and I wish to make it as clear to you as I can in few words — this island of Beetle Rock was like a slice left standing in a great granite ridge, by the cutting out of another slice upon each side of it. In its entire form, you could see, if you thought of it, that this ridge or arm had stretched continuously from a chain of hills to the eastward, out hither to a gradual slope and ending; but at some time or other in the long history of the earth, two enormous rents had split it through, and made the double channel of the Run; leaving the terminal cliff upon the west bank, and isolating in the deep, swift little river the middle fragment of Beetle Rock.

To the north, or up stream, the whole outline was precipitous, and overhung what were called the Basin Meadows; to the south, or down stream, it shelved rapidly to the level of the surrounding country. If you comprehend distinctly this description, you will better understand what happened on this Mysterious Island, while Ryne and Luther played their game of castaways.

Catharyne, with her tin spoon and a large milk-pan, beat laboriously some eight or nine eggs into a coarse froth; and then, forgetting the butter for the frying, set her pan across the stones between which the coals were heaped. Part of her large, flat omelette was very much burned and stuck to the pan, and part was still quite liquid, when she was forced to remove it from the fire. But they managed to scrape up on their split crackers enough to eat, and they played they liked it. Ryne secretly resolved that she would do some better cooking than that before the day was over; and she pushed the un-

happy pan under a cedar-bush, saying that they would keep that now to put all their scraps in, as she was sure she never could clean all the burned egg off, and should not know where to throw it if she did.

Luther watched his chance to get over the east bridge and go off into the woodland, "hunting." Ryne was glad to have him go, that she might carry out her domestic projects. They both felt secretly the need of busying themselves with all their might to fight off something that could not be homesickness — could it? Because they were actually at home, all the time; and only had to resolve to open a door or two, to enter right in among all the accustomed belongings.

Ryne went to work, therefore, in the buttery, making pies; the crust with butter and flour, both of which she found there, and used "by guess," mixing with cold water; the inside of redstreak apples, chopped up with maple sugar.

These were to be a great and wonderful astonishment to Luther, but not till the next day; for she had laid out her whole plan with due reference to circumstances, and intended to get up after Luther — and the neighbors also — should be asleep, and make a fire in the kitchen stove for the baking, which was to include at the same time some of those beautiful big sweetings. What a breakfast they would have, — and what a dinner, — without the need of any fire to get them by! What a manager she was; and how Luther would stare as she brought out her rich stores from her pantry!

She had to be rather in a hurry; and when all was done, to hide rolling-board and pin behind the flour-barrel, and carry the pies — three of them — up through the shed chamber and the clothes-closet, down to the kitchen; faithful to the stipulation that the ordinary passage back

and forth should be ignored. She put them safely into the oven, with the sweetings beside and between them; ready for the heat when she should supply it. She also laid a fire of chips and light wood, that there might be no noise to make, and no long work to do, in the night-time. She carried a kitchen candlestick up into the staircase bedroom, and put a match in the tray of it. She was glad to see, as she betook herself, at last, to her nest-like seat of corn-husks by the low shed-chamber window, and began to read her newest book of all,—“Eight Cousins,”—that it was raining a little, and looked likely to keep on. Luther would come home now; the horn had sounded for dinner at the Spellicks’; and he would stay in with her this afternoon.

He came, presently, bringing fox grapes; great purple clusters, ripened on a bare south face of rock, rich with sweet, wild flavor. They ate, and talked, and read; then they played morrice on a chalked board, with corn-kernels, red and white, for men. The afternoon wore away with clouds and rain that came up black, with thunder and lightning now and then, out of the south, and gradually piled themselves away northward, leaving clear weather again. At sunset the wind changed suddenly, and the great black heaps were flung back. It was like a cyclone, returning upon its circuit in a quick fierce gale. Leaves and twigs flew in the air; there was a roaring in the pines and cedars. The elms out in the meadows bent and streamed like women’s hair and garments in a tempest. Shingles flew from the barns, and the bright-painted weather-jack tossed his legs and arms in frantic convulsions, and was whirled away bodily over the tops of the trees. It lasted nearly an hour; then everything was calm again. No damage was done near them; but Cale Spellick was saying to his wife,—

"It was jest the edge of a tornado; there must hev been a middle somewhers."

Up at Bolder's Mills, where the water of Chindecook Pond came over into its outlet of Moosewood Run, they knew where the middle had been; and miles already down the road a man was riding a running horse for dear life; shouting as he went by the farmhouses and past the people on the way. And as he shouted, the others took it up; and other men flung themselves on horses, and went hither and thither; and the word they cried was, — "*Dam broke at Bolder's! Water coming down!*"

And now the time came for Catharyne's baking. Luther fell asleep quickly, stretched on the husks, after his supper of crackers and cheese. So she was early in the kitchen, touching her match to the wood in the stove; and she trusted to the wet and the gray of the weather, and the deepening twilight, to keep people in-doors, and her little thread of smoke unnoticed.

There began to be a smell of pie-crust, and of apple juice boiling out and simmering on the oven floor. Ryne, waiting for her cookery to be accomplished, opened a door from the kitchen upon a narrow plankway between that and the woodshed building. It was quite dusk now; she went and stood on the step at the end, listening to the rush of the Run, and watching the stars as they broke slowly through the torn edges of used-up clouds.

Suddenly, other lights glimmered,— down below. Lanterns moved along the ridge from Cale Spellick's house to his barn, and from the Spellicks over to Parson Symes's. Voices called, excitedly; everything happened in a flash almost; before she could think or wonder, two men — Cale and Hiram — were upon the bridge, rushing across with great strides, one calling after the other, — "You take

the horse, and make for the Back Hollow; start up New-al's folks, — nobody else will. I'll see to the cattle!"

And the other answered, — "Drive 'em up on the Ridge! Old Beetle-head'll stand! It'll spread there in the medder; but it'll gorge in the cuts. The house'll go, or it's a wonder!"

Nobody to stop for here; nobody to warn. And yet a little girl stood listening, terrified, to she knew not what; and a boy lay asleep among the corn-husks in the old shed chamber. And the dam was broke at Bolder's, and the water was coming down!

"*Flood! Flood!*" Ryne heard the shouts down the valley-winding at the little settlement where the river bent round to a short air distance across the flats.

"*Freshet! Freshet! Quit and run!*" Some instinct helped her to understand, and to remember also the six words of consequence to her in Hiram Spellick's shout. "Old Beetle-head'll stand! The house'll go!"

She sprang back through the kitchen; unfastened the shed-door and flung it back; scrambled with hands and feet up the steep step-ladder; seized Luther, — by his hair, — anyhow.

"The water's coming! It's a flood! Come up to the pulpit! Hurry! hurry! I heard the men say so!"

In a dreamy fright, not knowing flood from fire, she dragged him up and made him follow. He missed a step, and fell at the foot of the ladder. Ryne pulled him to his feet, and out at the shed-door upon the rock terrace.

"Now be wide awake, Luther, or you'll fall and be killed! Climb up, the way we always go."

Something sounded like thunder. Something that rolled nearer, louder, and did not stop. A pale light glimmered about them; the moon was rising; they could see their way up the pebbly gullies, and along the splintered gal-

leries, and over the open platform, wide enough but showing for nothing on the face of the great steep looked up at from below.

They came safe into the pulpit. The round moon-lamp was lifted over the hill-line at the east, and swinging softly along the blue between the whitening clouds.

And the flood was coming down from the north !

Roaring and plunging, it was breaking in upon the distance ; it darkened down along the landscape, revealing its terrible aspect as it came. A towering mass of black water and white foam and tossing wrecks,— roofs, beams, fences, trees, hay, dead and struggling cattle, — things they could not distinguish nor comprehend ; hurling itself toward them along the pathway of the Run, spreading and scattering its ruin as it came, high up over the Basin Meadows.

It struck the Beetle cliff like a sea ; it surged into the narrow cuts ; it drifted its burden of destruction into them and against their openings ; it made a dam for itself, and poured over it into the rocky channels like a cataract ; the water rose and rose, over shelf and terrace ; it raged on, taking the little island bridges before it.

Now, really, the children were wrecked ; the house itself was wrecked ; the island was cast away.

The house remained, with the water pouring in through the upper windows. It was shifted on its foundations ; it was driven — happily — hard up between the old pine-tree whose roots ran far into the fissures of the cliff, and the rock itself toward which the buttery window opened. The little buttery lean-to and part of the shed were quite crushed in and shattered to pieces. But only water reached the dwelling-rooms ; and the force of that was partly spent and broken in the subsidence across the great meadows, and against the barrier of the rock ridge.

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The flood went on and on; it filled the little valley below the bend; it filled and flooded its barns and small houses; but the great Eiger, the rushing wave, that had come fifteen miles with its uprearing head, stretched itself down slowly to its level, and busily made its broad bed in new lakes spreading back to the feet of the parallel hills.

Cale Spellick's house was safe; it was on the high knoll upon the right bank of the Run; but the knoll was to-night an island. There was many a desert-islander, up and down the Moosewood valley, stranded in his own home, cut off by the spreading waters. There was, — the pity! many a wrecked home; many a drowned, bruised corpse floating away or lying tangled in the terrible drift-heaps.

The Symeses were safe at the Spellicks'. Their house was gone; covered, in its low nook under the hill; whether destroyed or not they could not know.

Cale Spellick himself was out on the cliff-end of the east-side Ridge, looking down upon the desolation. "I s'pose likely thar *was* more *of* it at the Delooge," he said to himself. "But I donnoah's Noah could *noah*'r any more!" And he smiled grimly in the midst of his solemnity, with a dim notion of something curious in his speech now it was spoken; though Cale Spellick could as soon have made a poem as a pun, on purpose.

He would have been far from any purpose of the kind at this moment. His mind was fixed on two things: the endeavor to discern if there were any struggling life near him, calling for help; and if by any means he could himself cross the gulf that lay between him and his house. A tree had swept into the wide mouth of the east cut, and had lodged in its narrowing passage at the swell of the island, just underneath where he stood. Some beams and fragments had been hurled into the clutch of its branches.

He descended along the edge of the precipice to where, by some dropping and clinging to shelves and crevices, he could get near enough for a leap; and in a few minutes he was on Beetle Rock, at about half-way to its top.

"I think it must be because we told so many lies," said a childish voice up above him, shrill and trembling with fear and trouble. The sound seemed to drop down to him through the quieting air, from above the monotonous din of the rushing water. "We was determined to pretend it, and now 't is!"

"I'm so cold! If we could only get down somewhere!"

"We would n't let on there was a house to get into, and *now* there is n't. We wanted to fix things for ourselves, and *now* there ain't anything to fix with," went on the first little self-judging voice, like that of a spirit dropped out of its world, and knowing why it deserved to be left out.

"Do you s'pose we'll live till pa and ma get home?"

"HUL-LO! *I guess we'll see about it!*"

And the pebbles rolled down from under Cale Spellick's feet as he strode up the gullied path.

I have not space to tell you much more about it. Cale Spellick got them home; the boys were out presently with rafts and lanterns, between island and island. They slept with all the young Symeses in a great open garret at Cale's house, the few hours they could sleep before morning; and theirs was one story of the many stories there were to tell, over and over, for long after, of the night of the Great Freshet.

The news got to Peru; and the next night brought Mr. and Mrs. Savage — traveling until morning — back again.

The children had been taken up to Miss Rebecca's,

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where their parents would be sure to expect to find them on their way; and here all our Beetle Rock friends remained for two or three weeks; while the waters subsided, and the house was partially restored, and things made ready for them to begin over again on what Luther never wished afterward was a "real desert island."

"'Cause you see," the little Radical told Miss Rebecca, who talked it over pretty seriously with him, "you may n't mean to go to things; but you kind o' want to know they're there to go to! Besides, I've concluded," he added, with equal magnificence and magnanimity, "that if I *was* to make things all up again myself, I could n't make 'em up — so fur — any better than they be now!"

Ryne stood by, but she did not say, "I told you so;" and Luther thought he had discovered his wisdom, at least, all himself.

But Ryne said, regretfully, "There's one thing: we shan't ever know now whether those apple-pies would have been good or not!"

GIRL-NOBLESSE.

A REPEAT OF HISTORY.

[INTRODUCTORY.— I was asked by the editor of "St. Nicholas," in which magazine this story first appeared, to prefix a little note of explanation to my analogue, which I therefore reprint here.

It is not a "Repeat of History," as such; it is a bit of incident in which something that happens bears a parallel likeness to another thing that happened long ago. It was suggested by a visit I made, a summer or two since, with a young party, to an old block-house near the coast of Maine, a genuine relic of the Indian and colonial times. Cooper's novels were among the great delights of my girlhood. His "Pathfinder," in which the lovely Indian girl, Dew-of-June, saves the life of the heroine, Mabel Dunham, by warning her to seek shelter in the log-defense, (telling her, mysteriously, when all seemed safe in the forest-fort where she was staying with her father, the sergeant of the garrison,— "Block-house good; got no scalp;") the adventures that followed; the plots and rude retributive vengeance of Arrowhead; the fidelity of June coming to shut herself up with Mabel while her savage kindred were besieging the block; all these had fascinated me over and over again, and impressed on my mind a clear vision of the place and surroundings as described. So that when I stood in this other similar structure, and found its rough, primitive plan the very same,— and when certain little jokes and frights befell and amused us,— I thought how easily the same characteristics illustrated themselves, and even circumstances fell into significant resemblance, in the old, wild time and the new, cultivated one. The idea led me into the writing of this story. You who have read, or may now read, the "Pathfinder," will recognize the adaptation and application of names, as well as the spirit and action of the persons, in several cases in the present tale; as, indeed, they are partly pointed out as it goes along. The things unexplained I will leave you the pleasure of discovering for yourselves.— A. D. T. W.]

"JUNIA ROYD."

That was the way it sounded, and that was the way it had come to be spelled in Nonnusquam, as well as in other out-of-the-way new places to which the old family of the Roughheads had scattered and drifted. The girls in Mrs. Singlewell's school hardly knew whether to think it funny or pretentious when it was explained to them. It was ridiculous, anyway, that there should have been an "origin" to this village name, or that ancient spelling and present pronunciation should have anything to do with each other. They called it "Rough-head," and so applied it, in the school-girl derision that is so cruel, and that was directed by the common consent of a certain set toward this young girl, against whose admission among them they had scornfully objected that she was "only one of the aborigines."

Nonnusquam was known farther, but perhaps not better, as the seat of a superior school for girls, and as the summer residence of a few wealthy people who had bought estates and built houses among its lovely heights and along its water-borders, than as the quiet, honest, homely, uncultivated farm-settlement, which it began by being, and which it had continued to be up to the sudden advent and rush of city discoverers.

And Junia was a meek, modest, easily oppressed sort of girl, — on one side of her character. Strong points lay opposite and in balance, which we may find out, as the people from the great hubs found out the glory of the hills and waters in quiet Nonnusquam.

One of the brightest things ever said in satire was that concerning our grand, old, noble, mean, persecuted and persecuting New England ancestry: "The first thing they did here was to fall upon their knees; the next was to fall upon the aborigines." That was very like what

some of the city settlers and improvers had done in Nonnusquam. They had fallen down and worshiped before the magnificence of nature,—they had built their shrines there; then they had set foot of pride on the primeval human nature in whose rough simplicity was hid, perhaps, a grandeur also. It came hardest upon the “little ones,” for despising whom there is a threatening; and it came most openly from the other little ones, than to cause whom to offend, by spirit or example, a millstone round the neck is better.

So Nonnusquam was divided into twain; yet there were shades in the differences, and crossings in the partings, that were delicate to adjudge.

Young people are indiscriminate: they could not see the difference between the Royds, or Rougheads, and the Polliwocks. They could not appreciate that Redman Royd, late owner of half the pasture-lands and intervalles bought up by the new gentry, and still holding craftily certain interjacent coveted meadow-strips and wooded ridges,—a power in town-meeting and political convention,—a man with a blaze in his eye under his old straw hat for any too cool or level glance from beneath more stylish brim,—was more to be considered or accepted than Stadpole Polliwock or Evetson Newt. Consequently they could not appreciate that Junia Royd could have privilege among them at the seminary or in their little social life above the small Polliwocks or Captain Newt's Saramandy.

“R-o-u-g-h-e-a-d, for *Royd*! That's nonsense!” said Hester Moore.

“E-n-r-a-g-h-t, for *Darby*! That's a fact,” said Amabel Dernham,—“in a certain English family name. And there are plenty of others, almost as queer.”

“E-n-r-a-g-e-d, hopping-mad! That's the fact for me,—and for plenty of others in a certain American school,” returned Hester.

"What's the use?" asked placid Amabel.

"Oh, you'll give in, and be as polite as a pink," charged Hester. "I know. You can't show your mind, ever."

"I can't *tread* on *anything*," said Amabel. "The other side of my mind comes up then, and I show that."

"No need of treading," said the incipient woman of the world. "You can walk 'round things, or put them out of the window. But *you*'ll make right up to 'em, and cosset 'em; see if you don't."

So Junia Royd was (figuratively) "walked 'round;" "put out of the window;" made to feel like a phantom. The girls, whenever it so suited them, behaved precisely as if she was n't there; rather, perhaps, as lacking the second sight themselves. For if they could have seen her in the spirit,—ah, that is the secret of all our sins against the second Great Commandment!

There were a few little Eves whose souls were not strong against odors and colors of apples and plums which came from Squire Royd's garden, and were irresistible at lunch time. These little Eves would take and eat, though they must thereby make acquaintance with second-rate, which is always evil, as well as with first-rate, which is always good.

Then, also, there was Amabel Dernham.

Mrs. Singlewell was a woman of observation and instinct. She might find herself in a dilemma, but when she moved she made the best move to be made. She put Junia Royd as desk-mate with Amabel Dernham. I will not say that Amabel did not at first feel secretly a little "put upon." Hester Moore came by within an hour and whispered, "Little Miss Muffet!" But that rather touched Miss Muffet's pride in the right place; and she stuck to her tuffet, and to its sharer, like a woman. A real, true woman; not a feminine creature, afraid of spiders.

Junia Royd was slight and dark ; Amabel was large and fair ; they looked together like a little deep-colored, velvet pansy, and a delicately superb one of white and gold. Junia bent her dusky head to her contrast and worshiped. The sunshiny contrast bloomed on serenely, and, by very sunshine and serenity, was gracious.

Amabel shared her Latin Lexicon with Junia ; she showed her how to trace the derivations and disentangle the constructions. She explained "abstracts" and "criticisms" as school exercises ; she reminded her of the order of lessons and the obligation of rules, until these became familiar to the new-comer. In short, she was just "as polite as a pink," — or as a princess pansy.

Junia would lay a Jacqueminot or a Gloire de Dijon rose on Amabel's desk, coming early to school on purpose ; Amabel would put the crimson flower in her blonde hair, or the golden-colored one against her breast-knot of brown or red ; and one was pleased and the other was happy. But Junia never offered a pear or a peach at that shrine ; she kept those for the sort to whom she would not cast pearls, — the sort who would render stolid, narrow-eyed regard, and move grovelingly to her approach, for the sake of them. She gave simply what they came for, asking for no further sign in exchange. One does not care to caress that kind of animal ; one would rather have a fence between than not.

And so, with all, she lived a phantom life among these girls ; even with Amabel, not getting beyond the grace and the politeness, — the shy, sweet utterance of thanks, or the matter-of-course chirping over their lessons. If on one side there were — creatures — in their pen of exclusiveness, on the other there was but a bird on a bough. Any beautiful, realized friendship was the dream of her own heart. Amabel was claimed on all sides when desk

hours were over; her way did not lie with Junia's; each drifted to her separate element and belonging between school-out and school-in. Junia made long romances to herself of what these intervals were like to the birds of the air; as for Amabel, she flitted away and forgot Junia altogether every day, from two in the afternoon till nine next morning, when she lighted again beside her.

Neal Royd was Junia's brother; she had a hard time with him, often, in these off hours. She worshiped him also,—and first and always; he was brother and sister and all to her; tyrant and scoffer, too, with his man-mas-terfulness and boy-cynicism. He had the hard, proud nature of Neal and Roughead; "Neal," in the old Celtic, stands for "chief." He was bitter against the "high-noses," and bitter with his sister because they snubbed her. He was contemptuous of the girl-noblesse; yet he would often crush June with scorn of her position with them,—that "she could not be anybody as well as anybody else." He would have been well content to carry the Royd rights level with the "high-nose" assumptions. His contempt, therefore, was not absolute or successful.

He was especially mordacious against "Pester More." He had his own grudges against the name, belonging also to "Alexander the Great," her brother. "*He*'ll never weep for more worlds to conquer. The world's all More, already, for small Shandy," quoth Neal Royd. He would give him both titles, the great and the small, in one sentence. "Small body and high strut,"—"big spread and little spunk," he said of him, and not untruly.

Hester Moore had turned her back upon Neal once, long ago, as only raw rudeness could have done, and left him *planté là*, in the face of bystanders, when he would have handed her a handkerchief that she had dropped; and Sandie had served him a mean trick, and never given

him a chance to pay it off. It was up at the Little Wittaquee — the brook that feeds the Big Wittaquee before it runs past Nonnusquam. Neal was trout-fishing; he knew a place that few others knew, and he had just got a splendid fellow playing around his line, when "*ploomp!*" came a stone from right over his head into the pool; and "*ploomp! ploomp!*" another and another, breaking great circles in the still water, and scattering the fish, of course; besides (which was even worse), a voice jeeringly advertising the discovery of his secret. Starting to his feet, and facing about and upward, he saw small Shandy coolly looking over, not at him, but upon the farther water, as if simply bent upon his own amusement, and as if not knowing that "Neal was there."

Down went the rod upon the bank, and up the rough steep went Neal, scrambling and grasping, making with swift vengeance for the petty foe, whom, even after the breathless ascent, he knew he could overtake in a fair run upon the level above. But, lo! reaching the ridge, from which the down-like table spread away for half a mile toward another climb, there was Master Alexander upon his pony Bucephalus, putting four legs to their best against his two!

"Another time!" articulated Neal Royd, with deliberation, standing stock-still in black wrath, not even raising a fist to shake impotently after the "meaching minnum." "Another time! If it is n't till we're both men!"

And that was what, indeed, seemed most likely, since Sandie Moore was off the next day to Mount Desert, to meet a yachting party for his holidays, and at their end, at Exeter Academy again; and in the intermediate short space that he had been at Nonnusquam, had shown the small, conscious shrewdness of his sort in keeping well out of "the Roughead's" way.

Neal Royd was not without his untrimmed points of human nature, though there was better blood in him than in Sandie Moore. He was an aborigine yet, in that he was the enemy of a girl for her own offenses and those of her kin. A savage will ambush and will take scalps of women. Neal Royd thirsted for a chance or a contrivance to "pay off" to "Pester More" the interest, at least, upon the accumulating family debt. He was only fourteen; there was hope for better things in him, since he began with something generous enough to resent a meanness even more than a malice. It would be his turn now, though, if a way should show; and fair enough, if he served them in their own fashion. They, not he, had set it. "June would let a grasshopper kick her!"

All this has been historical introduction. We come now to the beginning of our "repeat."

A gypsy party at the old block-house. A straw ride to Mill Creek Landing; the steamer, touching at ten o'clock, for Penbasset; the lovely river sail, the quiet cove, the steep rocks, the cavern, the woody summit, the oak-glade in the farm-edge; above all, the real, true, old-settlement block-house that the colonists had taken refuge in, the Indians had invested,—with the bullet-holes in its timbers, the places charred and blackened by flames against its massive sides, the excavation beneath in solid ledge, and the tradition of an underground passage to the cavern by the river.

All Mrs. Singlewell's young ladies were to go; the great difficulty was male attendance. It was September, and the youths—"high-nose"—were just away at academy or college. The youths,—snub-nose,—even if they were to be asked, would hardly go, merely as "Polly-put-the-kettle-ons," and to be snubbed some more. One of the

inconveniences of a small town, cleft in social twain, arose. Early harvest occupied the able-bodied men; corn and barley were of more consequence than a day's chore. Who should carry baskets up and down, fetch wood and water, and hang the kettle — for the picnic party?

Amabel Dernham thought "Mamma would let Zibbie go" (Zibbie was short for Zorayda Brunhilda, — Z. B., — the magnificent Moorish and Teutonic prefixes to the plebeian Yankee of Spodge); "besides, it would be only fun to do it nearly all ourselves."

Hester Moore went unblushingly to Junia Royd, and invited her to invite her brother.

"You are the only one who has a brother at home," she said, with an air of conscious penalty-for-honor. "They would all go if they were here, of course; only Mrs. Singlewell's mother had to be sick at just the wrong time — when they *were* here — and put us into the wrong time now."

Hester Moore had probably never spoken so many consecutive words to Junia before in their whole school year.

"I will tell him," said June, not without her own dignity, "if you mean it for a message; but very likely he will think it a wrong time for him to be in."

"Oh, I don't see why," said Hester, carelessly.

To Junia's amazement, Neal said that he would go. Then something in the set of his face startled her differently.

"O Neal!" she said, "don't! — I mean — don't *do* anything!"

"Why, what do you suppose they want me for?" asked Neal. "I shall make myself of service — to the interests of society in general — in any way that I see chance for."

"O Neal! don't look for chances! That's just what I mean." Junia had heard the word too often not to be apprehensive of it.

"You may be sure I won't waste time in looking, if I can *make* one," was all that Neal vouchsafed. "And I shall go."

Poor little June! With her awe of Neal's tremendousness, and her gentle dread of harm or pain to any, she shivered with vague imagination of little less than an upset canoe on the river in the pleasure-boating, or a block-house blown up, in good earnest, with dynamite! If she could only warn her Amabel, — or knew what to warn her of! From that moment the gypsy party had only trembling and terrors for her; at all events, in the looking forward. When they were fairly embarked, the delights of the way asserted themselves and absorbed her temporarily; in the pauses, or recurrences of thought, she remembered to look forward again, and the nameless dread began anew. Neal was so reckless of what he did when the freak was on! She was sure there would be some disaster, — something to make them wish they had not gone.

Amabel, sitting between her and Hester Moore in the wagon, told Hester something that gave Junia a cold shudder at the outset.

"If I were superstitious, I'd hardly dare be here," said the girl. "Old Sabina said such a queer thing this morning. She brought up my dress, this," — touching the light cambric frills that lay about her in white freshness, — "into my room last night, and I spread it out so nicely on my lounge. Then I got out my ribbons and my neckerchief, and put everything together just as it was to go; and this morning I tied up my flowers, evenly, and laid the bunch at the side, where it is now; and there I was, you see, all *but* me, just as straight and prim and complete. And old Sabina came in, and I showed her. I was doing my hair. 'See how nice it looks,' I said;

and, do you think, she just gave a screech, and flew at it, and tossed everything apart, and flung the dress on a chair. 'For goodness' sake, Miss Amy, don't ever do a thing like that again! Don't streak out things you're going to wear and make 'em look like *that*! Why, my sister, that's a widder, laid out just a long frilled counterpin once, over two chairs, not to muss it while it aired; and it looked so *goshly*, mother made her take it away. And do you b'lieve, Miss Amy, 't warn't a week 'fore my brother David he come up dead, in a letter!'"

"Oh, don't!" cried Junia, excitedly; and Amabel, turning with a laugh on her lips, saw June as white as the dress.

"Why, do you mind such things?" she asked. "It sounded so funny!"

"So — '*goshly*,'" replied Junia, trying feebly to turn off her nervousness by the quotation.

"I don't see what she has to do with it," remarked Hester, remotely.

Junia, put in the third person, stayed put, and held herself aside. Put down? Easily quenched? These easily quenched persons are not always "down." There is a fine inward retreat, of which the putter-down may scarcely be capable even of supposing.

In this retreat Junia troubled herself afresh for Amabel. She was always with Hester Moore; and June was sure that Hester Moore would be that day like a tree in a thunder-storm, for whatever bolt should fall.

"If you would just keep with me to-day, — some of the time," — she entreated, and then shyly qualified, standing by Amabel upon the pier.

She had never asked for herself or put herself in the way before. Amabel gave a glance of surprise.

"It is such a wild, great place," said June.

"We shall all be there," returned Amabel. "Of course, we shall be together."

Amabel had said truly; there were two sides to her mind, and she was sometimes a little vacillating in her action between them.

The bright little steamer, with its pretty lattices of white-painted rope, its striped awnings, its flying colors, came around a green promontory and glided to the landing. There was a warping in, close to the pier-head; a shock and tremble of the tall timbers as it swept suddenly against them; a flinging of the foot-plank; a hurrying on board; and instantly, like a flock of butterflies, the girls, in their white and dainty-colored dresses, and shady, veiled or feathered hats, had fluttered and settled here and there, brightening up the decks with their motion and alighting.

Mrs. Singlewell was coming last, — Miss Fidelia Posackley, the assistant, was just on board, — when a boy on a gray pony came galloping down the road, reining up just in time on the wharf, and waving a yellow envelope above his head, as he kept on at slackened speed toward the steamer.

"Mrs. Singlewell!" he shouted; and the lady took her foot from the plank and turned around.

"All aboard!" was called impatiently from the boat, and two men already held the gang-plank, ready to draw it in.

"A telegram!"

Mrs. Singlewell tore it open; there was only an instant for deciding anything; she passed down the gang-plank, despatch in hand.

"It is from Fordstoke," she said to Miss Posackley. "My mother is ill again. I shall have to go on to Riggston, leaving you in charge at Penbasset. I am very sorry. I shall be very anxious."

Miss Fidelia assured her of all possible care. But Miss Fidelia Posackley was one of those who can only move between ruled lines of duty and precedent, and, by very adherence to them, go straight to grief — or stand and take it — when sudden deviation is demanded. They turn into pillars of salt instead of getting out of Sodom. Miss Posackley was invaluable in school routine; she was worse than nothing for an emergency. It was with a great misgiving, therefore, that Mrs. Singlewell saw her flock of butterflies flutter up the bank into the oak glades at Penbasset; Miss Fidelia, with her green lawn over-dress, looped in two precisely similar, long-pointed festoons behind, walking among them like a solemnized Katydid. It was too late to have helped it; there would be no boat back that stopped at Nonnusquam till the one at six o'clock, which they were to take.

"Get them all together by half-past five," charged Mrs. Singlewell at parting; "and let there be no going in canoes."

At those words, one dread was lifted from Junia Royd's imagination.

"Your 'sign' is read out now," said Hester Moore to Amabel. "It's only the old lady that's 'come up' worse again in a telegram."

Junia would not have spoken so, or allowed herself that "only;" nevertheless, another weight — or, rather, a dim, grim sense of one — was eased within her mind.

She was able, with a released spring of enjoyment, to hasten up the cliff-path and over the beautiful oak-open, in the little party that instantly sought the famous old block-house. Another detachment took the shore way along the rocks toward the traditionary cavern.

Junia had read with enthusiasm Cooper's fascinating stories of border life and forest warfare. The legends of

Deerslayer and Pathfinder were realities to her in that realm where fancy shapes its facts and maps its territories. She had not more surely come to this actual spot than she had gone through the wilderness, drifted upon the water, and dwelt in the lonely fort or on the rudely fortified island, with Judith and Hetty and the young hunter,—the brave old sergeant, the captious Cap, Eaudouce, the honest scout, and Mabel Dunham. But to come here to-day was to make that strange join of things dreamy and things tangible which causes the visible to seem a dream and the vision a substance. To say, "Right here those, or such, things have been," was to narrow down to touch and presence what she had before gone far away into wide thought-land to find and get conception of.

"Mabel Dunham!" All at once that came and fitted. Her very heroine was here — Amabel. How strange that the name should happen so! Amabel Dernham. And herself, — why, she, little, dusky, insignificant, secretly worshipping friend, — what was she but the very Indian June of the wild-wood story?

She rehearsed it all to Neal, who walked up with her, and who knew the old tale by heart as well as she.

"And I'm Neal Roughead, — Chief Arrowhead!" cried the boy.

"And if I knew what you'd do to Amabel, — my Mabel, — I'd go and tell her, as June did Mabel Dunham!" retorted quiet Junia, in a quick, low, angry tone.

"T is n't your Amabel, — she's well enough; it's the rest of 'em. It's that 'Pester' More!"

"She's always with that Hester Moore; what happens to one will happen to the other."

"Let it, then. Good for her! Why is n't she sometimes with you?"

"What is it, Neal?" asked Junia, pleadingly.

"Don't know myself. Time enough when the time comes. Only you look out, and keep yourself in a clear place, and clear of 'Pester' More."

Junia was silent then, but her eyes, full of helpless trouble, would not leave her brother's; and somehow the trouble would not let her see the half-fun half hid in his, or that he was already amusing himself in advance with her.

"Sho, June! Don't work yourself up to concert pitch like that. You girls always suppose the end of the world, or nothing. I sha'n't tomahawk anybody. But I can scare their fish, or make 'em feel small, I guess, one way or another, before it's been their turn much longer."

With that, June had to make much of the relief again, and go on with the others to the block-house. Neal stopped at the "big flat" with some baskets, and was to return to the pier for more.

Not all the girls had read "The Pathfinder;" still fewer were acquainted with, or cared much for, the early history of Penbasset, in which this old block-house figured, as the other did in the novel. Miss Posackley dutifully enlarged to them upon the one; the girls who knew the enchanting fiction broke up the solid lecture with interpolations of the romance, and finally got the audience—all that was audience, and not restlessness and chatter—to themselves. June, knowing it all better than any, stood silent, and gazed intently about her, recognizing the points and landmarks of her dream. For one of these old block-houses was nearly a duplicate of another.

The heavy door of the structure had been long off its hinges; some of the great timbers leaned up against its side; an open space where its leaf had hung gave wide entrance into the dusty, empty, ancient interior. The nar-

row loops would else have let in little light. As it was, — low-raftered, deep, and heavily built, — there was enough of the shadow-charm of mystery for the young explorers, as they stepped across the great, rude, uncrumbled sill, and went peering in toward the far, dark corners.

"Such beams!" they exclaimed. "Whole trees! and big ones! And such bolts and clampings!"

"Here are the holes they fired their rifles from!"

"And here are bullet-holes at the edges, where the Indians tried to fire in!"

"But *this*, girls, is the trap-door — take care! Down here are the mysteries and the underground passage!"

"I'm going down!" cried Clip Hastings, always first, and often head-first.

"My dear!" remonstrated Miss Posackley, "it's five or six feet, and no steps!"

"No matter. Here I am!" replied Clip from the cellar, into which she had swung herself while the words were spoken. And half a dozen others had followed before Miss Posackley could call up rule or precedent for determined opposition.

"There! Stop, my dears! No more of you must go down!" she said, with outstretched, hindering hands, to the others. "I can't see how they are to get back again, I'm sure." And she fluttered to the brink, like a hen whose ducklings are in the water.

"Round by the cavern!" called back Clip. "Good-by!" Then the voices grew smothered under the solid floor, as the rebels groped away into the darkness.

"My dears! Young ladies! Really, this will not do!" called Miss Posackley. "Come back instantly!"

Were they out of hearing? No answer — no sound of one — returned. How far did the excavation reach? And what might be there? Water, possibly! An old well!

What might they grope or stumble into? Miss Posackley was in an agony.

The stillness that had occurred so suddenly continued. Some of the girls were frightened, some eagerly excited.

"Oh, where do you think it goes to? Have they fallen into anything?" cried the first.

And "They've found it; they've gone down to the river! Let us go too, *please*, Miss Posackley?" declared and besought the second.

"Not one of you; on *no* account!" said Miss Posackley, unsparing of her negatives in her vehemence.

Hester Moore was one of the explorers. Junia held Amabel by the arm, above. She had barely hindered her from following; not that she had really thought of danger, at the first, but simply that she saw Hester go, and she was to keep those two apart. If she could do but that all day long, not knowing why! Not waiting to know, — only clinging to the warning of Neal's words: "A clear place, and clear of 'Pester'!" There would be mischief somehow; and this would be the only sure exemption from it.

Neal Royd is not the first who has been terrible by hint and mystification, while tolerably mystified himself as to fulfillment. He walked up at this moment from the kettle-hanging, and looked in at the open door. He was "behaving so well," the girls thought; not putting himself where he did not belong. But then, what could one strange boy do among all of them? They were not at all in doubt of their veritable and sufficient terribleness — these little women in their millinery and manners!

"O Master Royd!" exclaimed proper Miss Posackley. "They have gone down there — half a dozen of them. Where do you suppose that underground way leads? They seem to be quite out of hearing. I am very much concerned."

"They say," returned Neal, with great gravity and weight of manner, "that there's a steep underground way to the river. But I should think it could n't be very safe; it must be very 'blind,' anyhow. I'll see what I can find out."

And he dropped himself down into the blackness, where he stooped and peered about; then moved with apparent caution away from the opening, and out of sight.

"The place is as still as death," he called back from beneath. "It's very curious."

"Oh, what shall we do?" cried Miss Posackley, in terror.

"If they only come out at the other end, it'll be all right. But if they get down anywhere and can't get up again; or get stuck in the middle — I declare! here *is* a hole!"

"Miss Posackley," he said, returning to the trap, "I think you'd better just step down here yourself." A queer little smothered sound interrupted him. "Hark! I thought I heard something. I really don't believe they can have got far. If you would just come down, — it is n't at all bad here, — and call to them, — they would n't mind me, you know, — it would be the best thing. And then you would have done all you could, you see; and if you want me to, I'll try the burrow."

"Oh, how *can* I?" faltered poor, shocked Miss Posackley, wringing her hands over the chasm.

"You'll have to be quick, I'm afraid," urged Neal, mercilessly solemn.

"Go back, young ladies," commanded Miss Posackley to the rear squad, who huddled about her, divided between frightened faith and most diverted skepticism. "Go down to the big flat and wait for me. Oh, how can I *ever*?"

"Oh, what a lark!" laughed out Kitty Sharrod, the

minute she was outside, and turning short around to look in through the great doorway. "Can't she see it's nothing but a lark all round? I'd give a coach and horses to be down there! She called me just as I was over the edge. It just stopped at me, — my luck! She's actually gone down! — How do you suppose she will come up again?" the girl added, slowly and sepulchrally, to her companions, who lingered, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

"Come back and see it out! She won't mind now she's down, and thinks we did n't see her go. — Do take care, Miss Posackley! We *can't* go off and leave you there! You'll want us to help you up again," shouted Kitty, leaning boldly down the trap.

A match flashed below; Neal held it right above Miss Posackley's head. Kitty Sharrod, gazing after its illumination, saw what Miss Posackley also saw — a row of crouching figures, two or three feet apart, each with hands on knees, flat against the low, rough wall of the far side. From the motionless rank burst a sudden, laughing salute.

Miss Fidelia's position before them, alone, would have been like that of a general at a review. Only, she had to crouch also, which impaired her dignity, and made the tableau irresistible. The floor was not more than four and a half feet — instead of five or six — from the ground below.

Neal Royd struck a light again, — a whole card of matches.

"Won't they get it?" exclaimed Kitty Sharrod, in an excited whisper, clapping noiseless hands. "But I'd give a Newport cottage to be there, and to see her face!"

II.

"Young ladies!" said Miss Posackley, in her most assured official voice. But the attitude neutralized it too absurdly. The doubled-up young ladies tittered all along the line.

"Master Neal Royd, put out those matches, please. And light no more. They are most dangerous."

"And disillusionizing," said a low voice somewhere in the dimness, as the little blaze expired beneath Neal's boot.

"This will all be laid before Mrs. Singlewell," said Miss Posackley, just as if she had been at full height upon the platform at the top of the long school-room. "At present, you have to go up as you came down. Master Royd, you will go before, if you please. Miss Hastings, you led the way; lead back again."

There came a scrambling, with laughs and outcries. Neal Royd was in the trap-way, head up, ready to spring forth.

"Oh! oh! I've lost — I've dropped something, Miss Posackley. I *must* look!" sounded suddenly in distress. It was Hester Moore's voice. "Just let me have a match one minute!"

"On no account," replied Miss Posackley. "Go up, Master Neal. Go up, young ladies. This is very extraordinary!" she concluded; but she gasped the word out, with a distressed puff between the syllables, quite irrelevantly.

"She meant ex-hausting," whispered Kitty Sharrod. "There'll have to be more ex-hoisting before they all get out. And she's bound to come up last! For shame, girls!" she cried aloud. "Make haste!"

"Hush up, Kitty Sharrod! — Oh dear, I *can't* find it. Don't tread all around, girls!"

"Is it your handkerchief, Miss Moore? I may be able to pick it up for you presently," Neal Royd said, most suavely, giving his hands to Clip Hastings, who, short but springy, came lightly, with that aid, to the upper floor again.

Hester Moore suddenly hushed up herself.

"Have you found it? What was it?" they asked her, as they crowded forward from below.

"Never mind; it's all right now," said Hester, gruffly.

"She's found she never lost it. That always makes people cross," said little Lucy Payne, while Neal reached down and lifted her from the arms of Sue Merriman, who held her up to him.

Neal gave a keen glance sidewise at Hester's face when she grappled with the outer edge of the trap, and struggled up heavily, and with much pushing from her comrades, through the aperture, scrambling ignominiously out on hands and knees.

"She *has* n't found it. And it's no handkerchief. And she's in some scrape," he said to himself.

"O Hester! have n't you lost something else? Where's that lovely" —

"In my pocket, silly! Do be quiet!" interrupted Hester, pushing Lucy Payne aside, and making sullenly for the door.

"Hester! Hetty! She's missing the greatest fun of all," said mischievous Clip Hastings in a low tone, — "the seeing Miss Fidelia emerge. What *will* she do with her dignity?"

"I'll take care of Miss Fidelia and her dignity," said Neal Royd. "Though, perhaps, that is quite as much your own business." There was a chivalrous indignation

in the boy's tone. "Girls never know when a joke or a torment has gone far enough," he thought.

He jumped down through the trap as the last of Miss Posackley's charge gained foothold above, and then he dropped on all fours in the dust and rubbish, putting his head down, and his shoulders up, to the full stretch of his strong-braced arms.

"Step on my back, Miss Posackley. June, reach Miss Posackley your hands."

And Miss Posackley, who had a neat, small, light-booted foot, and nothing lumbering in her measured motions, first spread a little scarf she carried across the young Raleigh's coat, and then stepped with a truly Elizabethan air upon the offered support, and so, with not too ungainly struggle, up into the main room.

"I am exceedingly obliged, and really quite ashamed," she said, turning to Neal as he sprang out again and handed her the silken strip, with a quiet "Thank you" of his own, proceeding to dust his knees with his handkerchief. "But why — not, of course, that any of us should expect such aid from you — did you only think of it for me?"

"Perhaps because my jacket is n't for everybody's dust," he said. "Some people use you gently; and some tread upon you as if they meant it. It's your own fault if you can't guess the difference beforehand."

From that moment Miss Posackley had a respect for Neal Royd, and put a friendly confidence in him.

"No more going into the block-house, young ladies, without express permission," was Miss Fidelia's general order, as she came out and headed her flock once more, taking the way down to the big rock.

The kettle was filled and hung; the fire laid; the baskets and parcels all placed comfortably at hand. Neal

struck a match and touched it to the brush and pine chips, and a blaze went up. Then he judiciously withdrew himself in his former unpretentious manner, and sauntered off toward the block-house. He had more matches in his pocket, and he was not included in the forbiddance to the "young ladies." Ten minutes later, he sauntered back again to Miss Posackley and her party, to see if anything were wanted. He had something else in another pocket, — a dainty little golden chatelaine watch.

"June," said Hester Moore, a little while after dinner was over; "just ask your brother for some matches, will you?"

June looked up with a triple amaze at the allocution, the name, and the request. "What for?" she asked.

"Oh, we shall go into the cavern presently, and I want some for myself. I won't be caught again, as I was in the old block-house. I did n't half see that either. We went right down into that miserable hole. See here, June! Mabel and I are determined we will see it again, whether or no. You come, too, that's a good child. You know all about it. But now, just get the matches. I'll do as much for you any time."

"I do not think I shall need you to," said June, rather coolly. "And I don't believe Neal will let us have any matches. And we had better not disobey Miss Posackley. I'll ask Neal, though." And she went off at once, and did it.

Neal laughed.

"Cunning, is n't she? In a small way. But I guess I'm her match — though I've got no matches for her. She might set the *cavern* on fire, eh?"

"You're quite right, Chiefie; only I thought I had better give her your own answer."

"Well, that's it; only you need n't tell her the whole

of it. I say, June, what do you suppose she lost down there? What did she have — did n't you notice? — that she might lose? that she might be *afraid* to lose — or tell of, if she had lost it?"

Something flashed suddenly across June's mind.

"Why! she had a lovely chatelaine watch, just like" —

"That?"

"Chiefie! Where did you get it? Why, it is *Gracie's*!" she exclaimed, when she had taken the trinket into her hand and glanced at it on each side. "See, there is the monogram 'G. V.' She would n't let us look at it closely; I thought it was her sister's. She was crazy to wear Grace Vanderbroke's when it first came; I used to hear her teasing for it. It was at the jeweler's to be regulated, when Grace was sent for; she begged leave to get it and keep it for her till she came back. But she said Blanche Hardy would do *that*," June went on, with girlish ambiguity of pronouns. "Then Hester was provoked, and said it did n't matter — other people had chatelaine watches; she could borrow one from her own home if she wanted to; her mother and her sister — who is engaged — both had them; she only wanted to do her a kindness. And then to-day — oh! when she half showed it, she *did* make us think, if she did n't say out and out, that it was her sister's. And Blanche Hardy went yesterday with *her* sister, the bride, to Lake Rinklepin. Oh, Neal! She must have — borrowed it — out of Blanche's trunk!"

"All right. Now let her whistle for her matches — and her chances! I'll go and put it back where I found it. It was safe enough. 'Block-house good. Got no scalp.'"

"Don't be horrid, Neal. If you would only help her out of it — think! It would be — it would be being a real Chiefie to do that."

"I'm only a chief in the rough, Junie. And 'set a chief to help a thief!' There's no such saying as that, even in the New Testament!" And Neal strode off.

He had two or three strokes of revenge to choose from. He could walk up innocently to Miss Posackley before them all, and give into her charge what he had found, which would bring the whole disclosure down upon Pester More's head; or he could let her worry all day, and spoil her good time, reserving to himself the alternative of showing mercy at the last, and shaming her of her own meannesses, or of still finishing her off with the public exposure which she deserved. Or, again, he could put the thing back where he had found it, as he had said; leaving it and her to take the "chances," the probabilities of which he had his own ideas about.

He rejected the first and most summary method; for the rest, he postponed the matter. An Indian chief postpones the tomahawk; he understands the fine torture of suspense.

June was too tender for that, even with her foe. She could say nothing about Neal; she must leave him to manage his own affairs; but she did go to Miss Posackley — believing that her brother would do as he had said, and that the watch would have to be found over again in the block-house cellar — and asked her if "Miss Dernham and Miss Moore and I" could go up there again, "just for a few minutes."

Miss Posackley refused. It would be a precedent for all the rest. They had all seen it; that must now be enough.

"No more block-house to-day, my dear. I have quite made up my mind on that point. It is growing late, besides; and we are going to the cavern."

"Glad of it!" was Hester Moore's comment. "They all

would come tumbling after. Amabel, I want *you*. There are lovely rock-mosses up on the steep knoll." And she turned off without further notice of Junia, who had done her the kindness. Amabel followed, longing for rock-mosses, but demurring about cows.

"Cows don't go up the side of a house," retorted Hester. "And the fences are beyond it, too."

The rock-knoll rose from the extremity of the low, natural bank-wall which separated the block-house level on the front from the terrace below, the verge of which was the broad "big flat," and whence descended again, in abrupt declivity, the real precipice, in the face of which, upon the river-brink, was the traditional cave. The knoll jutted, like a steep headland, over into an adjoining meadow on its farther side; on the right, its ridge, bushy with sweet-fern and brambles, trended gradually to the plane of the fortress field. Toward the block-house, these wild growths gave a cover nearly all the way. Elsewhere, all was visible upon this plane to those upon the flat below.

A walled-in lane led from the left upper corner of the block-house field, between the meadow and some corn-land, up to the high, wooded pastures; at its head, a stout, heavy "pair of bars" stretched across. Up this lane Neal Royd was walking, whistling, having mended Zibbie's fire and filled her kettle for her dish-washing.

"I guess it'll keep that girl-flock to the lower lot faster than any commandment," he said to himself, as he came and leaned for a moment upon the bars. Out beyond, some seven or eight cows were quietly feeding.

Royd let down the bars and stood there watching the cows.

"They can't get farther than the block-house flat," he said again. "There'll be a red-skin blockade, sure

enough ; Pester More won't dare run that blockade, either. I like to see that laws are kept. I was to be useful ; I'll be as useful as I can."

He had no notion that Hester Moore and Amabel were at the very moment on that side of the terrace wall, hurrying along the sheltered dip of ground toward the block-house. He only meant they should not find it possible to get there. When he turned and walked down the lane again, they were already within the ancient wooden walls.

The cows had seen him, — had lifted their heads at his coaxing "Co! co!" — and with their kindly instinct were heading slowly toward the opened way, possibly anticipating a pan of salt.

Neal made straight for the big flat and the descent to the cavern. On the picnic ground he overtook June, lingering there alone. She had been helping Zibbie gather up the fragments ; Zibbie had now gone down to the pier, her arms laden with baskets.

"Where's the crowd?" Neal asked his sister. "What's left you out?"

"The crowd is in the cavern, and on the shore, and all along," she replied. "I waited with Amabel. She went with Hester Moore to get mosses on the knoll."

"Whe-ew!" whistled Neal, taking in the situation, and glancing up behind them. Nothing was moving on the knoll but great, red, horned creatures, wending their way down and deploying themselves around the block-house. Yes, another creature, too, which he had not seen in his reconnaissance at the bar place!

A grand old sachem of the herd and two young braves of steers had been in the wood edge, and had followed the gentle mothers down. The big horns and massive brute forehead of the patriarch were rearing with a proud, investigating toss, as he came magnificently through the lane-way.

The block-house was nearer the bank-wall than to the upper field and the lane by nearly three fourths of the whole distance.

"What is it, Neal? What do you mean?" cried June, hurriedly.

"They're well caught in their own trap," he answered. "Now let 'em stay awhile. You come along down." And he picked up an armful of baskets and turned to descend the cliff pathway.

Now June knew that they were in the block-house, though she had spoken truly in saying that they had left her to go upon the knoll. She, too, grasped the situation; she discerned what Neal had suspected and had done.

"You — mean — boy!" she exclaimed, in bitter, forceful indignation. There is nothing so keen, so cutting, *cruel*, as the two-edged sword which smites at once an offender and the offended, loving heart.

If she had not said that, Neal would have looked around, at least, to know if she were following; as it was, he kept his head quite straight away from her and marched on, disappearing down the rapid slope. June gave one swiftly measuring gaze upward, and then sprang to the low wall, scaled it, — scarce knowing where the tips of feet and fingers clung, — and flew along the ground to the block-house. She felt sure they were in the cellar and would not see. She rounded the building in a flash, and darted in at the open door.

"Amabel! Hester!" she called. "Come, quick! There are cattle in the field! Hurry! hurry! They're standing still and feeding; you can get out; only make haste!"

The bull was at the lane foot; he paused there, with his stately air of survey; he gave a low snort of question; he sniffed, as if suspecting something for his interference.

June stood in the doorway, watching; calling eagerly

again to her companions, who lingered, — Hester divided between the distress of her loss and her fear of the cattle.

“Girls! come! He’s moving!”

That masculine pronoun sent them up with a struggle. Hester clambered out of the trap, pushed up by Amabel; then was actually on the point of rushing forth, leaving Amabel to her own unaided effort.

“Shame! stop!” cried Junia, in a voice that her school-fellow never — she herself scarcely ever till to-day — had known for hers. “Take hold of her other hand!”

June already had Amabel by one hand; and Hester, constrained doubly, — for she could not have confronted the creatures alone, — obeyed. Meantime, the *Bos* (is that what “boss” comes from?) seeing and hearing and moving with something more of purpose, was tramping down toward the open doorway. The three girls saw him so, as they turned, and not twenty paces from the entrance.

“Oh, we can’t!” cried Amabel.

“He’ll come in!” shrieked Hester.

“Go up the ladder,” said June; and remarked as in a dream, as she said it, how that other June and Mabel Dunham had gone up that very ladder, into that very loft, long before, in the old time in the story. It was as if it had stood there a hundred years, waiting for them to come back and live their terrors over again together.

Hester and Mabel hurried up; June came last. Then the great animal actually walked in upon the floor below, and raised his voice in a mutter that trembled along the timbers under their feet.

Hester cried. Amabel shook with fright. June went over to a loop-hole that looked toward the flat. “There is no danger,” she said, quietly, and reached out through the narrow aperture, waving her white handkerchief.

Amabel looked at her watch. "It is a quarter to five now," she said; "and this is slow, too."

There was nobody in sight. The flat was cleared, and they were all down upon the shore, hidden and unseeing beneath the high, overhanging rocks.

June absolutely smiled. "Block-house good; got no scalp," she quoted. "They'll soon come up, and miss us. And there'll be Mrs. Singlewell's wise half-hour."

She picked up a strip of old split board that lay near, pulled her handkerchief fast into a cleft at its end, and thrust it far out through the opening.

"Chieffe will take care," June said again.

She spoke his name proudly and tenderly, sorry in her heart for her quick bitterness, and sure of how sorry he would be for any trouble to her.

"The worst that could happen would be for him to have to go up to the farm, and us to get belated. But we know the Ronnquists, and they'll take care of us, somehow. — It's so like the story, Mabel!" she added, with a loving movement toward the girl, that might have been the gentle grace of the Tuscarora June herself.

This half comforted Hester. If she could only have one more search, — properly, with a light, — and if then they could only get to Nonnusquam before Blanche Hardy, the next day! Blanche Hardy was so "awfully" true, — so hard on any little slip or quibble. She began to feel quite bold with the reaction; and to her small nature the rebound from fear was impulse to some safe insolence. She stamped upon the floor, below which the great beast was tramping. She even went to the upper trap-way and through the opening began to unfurl her parasol, with which she had been groping in the cellar.

"Pester More!" cried June, using involuntarily and most appropriately Neal's sobriquet, "do you know what you're about? That cardinal-red thing!"

"He can't touch us now," said the girl. "You said so."

"*Us!*" ejaculated June, contemptuously. "Somebody else has got to come, I suppose you know." And she took the sunshade unceremoniously into her own keeping.

Miss Posackley's little conductor's whistle sounded just before the half hour. The prisoners could see from the loop-holes the gathering from different directions, as the stragglers came in sight along the rocks and drew toward the pier.

The bull was pawing and snorting; occasionally a growling bellow broke forth, quite audible as far as the river; and the three girls saw many a quick start and turn, and a general air of huddling and questioning among their companions, as they hurried down the plank-way and pressed around Miss Posackley, with glances backward, and pointings, and gestures of wonder, if not of apprehension.

Miss Posackley looked tranquil. "Down in the meadow, probably," she was saying; "there is certainly nothing in sight."

But all at once there was a greater stir; a looking everywhere. There came a calling of voices.

June worked her heavy flag-staff up and down with difficulty. Then a dozen fingers pointed to the block-house and the white signal. Then Miss Posackley began to flurry and agitate. There were no provisional orders for a thing like this. She was off her tramway.

They could already see the white steam-wreath of the boat stealing along behind Long Point, a mile or so below. It had to make one stop at Burt's Landing; then another five minutes would bring it up. It was a little in advance of its usual time to-night.

Neal Royd came up the water-steps from the river to the wharf. There had been no prohibition against his

canoeing, and he had gone up the little creek beyond the meadow, thinking to reach the back-lying farm-house by the shortest way, and bring down help to get the cattle up again. Since the pasture-autocrat had appeared upon the scene, the conditions were changed. The girls were safe in the block-house, but to release them, another hand — and one used to the management of the herd — might be needed. From the upland path into which he struck on leaving his canoe, and by which, in a few minutes' walk, he gained the ridge, he looked across and perceived, as he supposed, the whole herd, returned meanwhile into its proper pasture, taking its slow afternoon way along the dips and windings in the direction of the twilight home-going. Brush copses and swells of land prevented his being certain of individuals or of the entire number; but the open level about the block-house was in full view, and was quite empty of intruders.

He had crossed to the head of the lane, a little beyond which he had been walking while on the ridge, had taken one more survey downward, put up the bars again, and gone back to his boating, relieved of further responsibility.

Rowing down under the woody banks of the creek, and again while beneath the cliffs upon the river, he heard, with some misgiving of uncertainty, that low roar, muffled in the distance. Was it in the distance of the pasture?

Springing up the pier-steps, he saw the excited, restless groups; the roar now came distinctly, and pronounced and heavy; the handkerchief-flag was waved once — and wildly — from that upper aperture in the block-house, then hastily dragged in by its clumsy pole.

Junia was missing from among the school-girls. Neal saw that with quick eyes, before he had seemed to look at all. And the fact that she was missing spurred him to

instant action. He ran up the long side incline of the roadway, and leaped the wall into the block-house field.

June's voice came clear and shrill from the loop-hole.

"Keep away, Neal! He's angry now. Don't come alone. We're safe up here; only bring somebody soon!"

Neal leaped the wall again, and ran down to Miss Fidelia.

"You had better leave this to me, Miss Posackley," he said. "Let Zibbie stay, to look after the young ladies. I'll get some one from the farm, if I can't do better. There's a train up from Hopegood's at seven; Ben Ronnquist will take us over; let somebody meet us at the Corners. Or, if we should miss that, Mrs. Ronnquist will keep the girls safe till morning. You need n't be the least uneasy. The old block-house is good for a worse siege, and you see they know what they're about! I'll run no risk."

Miss Posackley vibrated, rotated. Her bonnet whirled like a weather-vane between the opposite quarters of her alarmed anxieties. From the block-house came the horrible brute voice; from the advancing steamer the warning shriek of its arrival.

"Go on, girls!" Neal shouted, without ceremony, to the hesitating damsels. "Go on board at once. Come here, Zibbie."

By the pure force of his decision he had his way; Miss Posackley's young ladies turned, with shuddering submission, to the gang-plank. Miss Posackley gave one or two more spasmodic spins, and followed. She took in the wisdom of her forced conclusion gradually as she calmed. By the time she reported herself at Nonnusquam, she had innocently adopted it as her own. "It was the only thing to be done," she said. And the next day, when all was safe, and Mrs. Singlewell had returned to hear the story,

the subject had so grown upon her that she covered herself with quiet glory.

"It was no time to hesitate," she explained. "If there had been a minute more of excitement, we all might have been left."

"You acted most wisely and promptly, Miss Posackley," said Mrs. Singlewell, amazed at the fact in her own mind. "But there is never any knowing," she said to herself, "what latent energies a great emergency may draw forth."

Miss Posackley took the commendation with a meek pleasure. She had had no idea of falsifying; she simply had not seen herself as a weather-vane.

There is not very much more to be told of this little analogy of adventure and character.

Neal, left alone in command, considered briefly, then ordered his campaign. He did not like to leave the girls alone with their formidable neighbor and their own nerves, safe though they were from actual danger; nor would Zibbie consent to be "left around loose with that old ring-in-the-nose." He approached the block-house on the lower side, and called up to the loop-hole:

"June! Fling out a scarf, or something; red, if you have it."

June poked out Hester's cardinal sunshade.

"This?" she asked.

"Just the ticket. Drop it!"

"But oh, Chiefie! Please take care! Don't be venturesome!"

"Don't worry nor weep, June. The harbor bar is n't moaning." And with the ambiguous comfort of this allusion he seized the red parasol and made swift way around the field to the head of the lane, let down the bars again, and came through walking toward the block-house. He watched his moment when the creature faced toward him, and then unfurled the parasol and waved it defiantly.

"Auld Hornie" thought, perhaps, it was a girl-enemy; at any rate, he took the bait and challenge, and made furiously for the insolent bit of color.

Neal rushed up the narrow way, well ahead of him, through the bars, and along by the wall, for a sufficient distance; then he jumped into the corn-field, and thence back into the lane; and he had the bars up while the bull was still following his roundabout track, and raging at its doublings and interceptions. And in a moment more Neal returned, demurely holding over his head the red sunshade, somewhat damaged by its flight across two fences, to find the block-house garrison just cautiously and timidly emerging from its shelter.

He gave the parasol to his sister without apology, and ignoring ownership.

"Come along now; we've no time to lose," he said, and led the way to the rough cart-road, and up its rutty ascent to the farm buildings, visible half a mile off upon the hill.

As they walked, he made opportunity to come into line with, but scarcely alongside, Miss Hester Moore. He drew something from his pocket, which he held out to her at a fair arm's length, as if he had another dangerous creature to deal with.

"You may as well have this back," he said. "Two mean things don't make a smart one."

Hester clutched the trinket eagerly, then flamed at him:

"Two mean things! Then *you* let in those cattle!"

"Well, I did. But that was n't the mean thing I meant." And he left her, scorning to explain himself, or to rebuke her further.

"A regular meanie can't be made to be ashamed," he said to June afterward. "I give it up."

Ben Ronnquist, when he had heard from Neal the par-

ticalars of their having been left behind by the boat, hitched his horse to the broad-seated family wagon, which was to take them to the cars. Hester and Amabel were helped in first. A small boy was to go with the team to bring it back; and there was also Zibbie to ride in front with Neal.

"I wonder if there's room in here for June?" Hester asked, disfavoringly, from behind, when she and Amabel were seated.

"Well, I guess there'd better be!" said Neal Roughead, in a short, strong way.

Whether she took a cue at last from this utterance, or whether with her, as with Miss Posackley, the things that had been beyond her began to come to her by degrees, at least in so far as to reveal to her certain probabilities of a knowledge that might be power, Miss Moore sat awhile in the darkness, silent; and she spoke at length in quite different fashion.

"We've seen a good deal of each other to-day, June. We'll get together rather more after this, I think."

"Will we?" responded simple June. "It's only people that belong that get together, I think. To-day was an accident."

After they were in the cars, Amabel came and took a place by June. There was plenty of room; Hester, Zibbie, and Neal had each a whole seat.

"Don't you think, Junie, that people who want to, get to 'belong'? I'd like to 'belong' to people like you and Neal."

"Neal is a dear chiefie," responded gentle June.

("Arrowhead great chief," had said the Tuscarora woman in the story.)

When Blanche Hardy heard of June's behavior at the

block-house, she came to her, — not with sudden patronizing, or conscious compliment of approval, but with the warm impulse of like to like.

She stopped where June was standing, laid a hand lightly on her shoulder and another on her arm, leaning toward her as if drawn.

“You were courageous to do that,” she said. “And generous.”

June flushed brightly, but answered simply :

“I was not afraid. And how could I do anything else?”

Then Blanche Hardy leaned closer and kissed her. “You could n’t, I know,” she said.

Now Blanche Hardy, from pure height of character and its noble presence and showing, was the real queen of the school, — not by any means merely of a little artificial clique.

From that day June went — naturally and as one “belonging” — up higher. Blanche Hardy became her fast and intimate friend. Nobody, any more, could snub or condescend to her. She was of a peerage above clan or coterie. Yet she remained in all sweet loyalty and non-pretense as aboriginal as ever.

Amabel, loving and seeking June also, was won to her own true place among those who “belonged” through the longing to *be*.

It is only the half, or spurious, attainment, like half faith, or cant, that holds itself within marked and excluding lines ; the true noblesse is as catholic as the household of God’s saints.

In Cooper’s story, the miscreant Muir had died. All deaths are not by tomahawking. There is a deeper decrease by very miscreancy itself. I have nothing further

that it really matters to mention concerning Miss Pester More. Of course her disobedience in returning to the block-house was punished with an appropriate school penalty and disgrace; notwithstanding that she muttered some blundering expostulation about "going back for something she had dropped, — that did n't belong to her, — her sister lent her." She did not dare to make a broader statement, or to emphasize the importance of her excuse; she only smooched herself feebly with that additional blackening of falsehood; and as she spoke, met Junia Royd's eyes that flashed a swift, unconscious, condemning astonishment at her. She was glad, then, to smother her half-remonstrance in silence. After that day she fell off from Junia, not as one who turns from that which is unworthy or inferior, but as Lucifer might slink away from Michael.

Junia never uttered word again even to Neal concerning the affair of the watch; it seemed a thing quite covered, an exposure quite escaped. But a bird of the air was abroad, in some flitting invisibility, in the atmosphere of the little school world; and "something queer about it" grew to be a tacit conclusion and an unspoken public opinion. Blanche Hardy and Grace Vanderbroke had an especial quiet way and look when Hester happened near or her name was spoken. "They knew something," the girls thought; and without investigation or explanation, we may safely assume they did.

So, morally — and that is the only way that is of reality or consequence — Hester Moore died, and went to her own place.

It is human nature that repeats itself in young or old, in wild or civilized; history and romance are but the facts and pictures of it.

SALLY GIBSON'S SPUNK.

A BOARDING-SCHOOL STORY IN EIGHT CHAPTERS.

I.

THE stage came in late at Oakhaven on the river. The Girls' School would be all quiet under night rules; and Mrs. Gibson went at once with Sally to the Mansion House. At any other time Sally would have been delighted. She had never been in a hotel in her life. This was almost fifty years ago, in the days of real stages and hotels; when travelers were few and of consequence, and broiled chickens were genuine, and omelettes a true delicacy, and a mystery to modest private tables.

To arrive at nine o'clock, have a chicken and toast supper; to go up two flights of broad stairs, and along great wide entries to her bedroom; to get up to omelette and coffee and waffles for breakfast, at a long table with twenty other illustrious persons who were away from home and out in the world, would have been a point at once of history and romance to Sally, even if she had not come to Oakhaven to become a boarding-school girl at Miss Wilcroft's seminary.

A traveler was something; it was very well; but a boarding-school girl was a heroine of adventure, a creature to make a story out of.

Her cousin, Felicia Ingram, had preceded her here. She had used to stop at Rexford on her way, each half-year, from Boston, and stay a night with Sally; a night in which

the two girls slept scarcely a wink. The well-packed trunk was routed to the bottom, the new gowns displayed, the neckerchiefs tried on, and the gifts of ornaments Felicia had had in the holidays admired. And, best of all, the bags and packages of "goodies," that were to astonish the country scholars with city confections, were brought forth, plentiful enough to spare a half-way feast with cousin Sally.

But the trunk and the goodies were nothing to the stories. All the daring "scrapes," all the jolly feasting, the games, and the excursions, and the friendships, and the quarrels; who roomed with whom, and how the bedrooms ranged along the "upper hall" and through "the wing;" what number Filly's was last term, and which she meant to get this; above all, her comradeship with the very specimen girl, and queen of the whole frolicking set, whose school-name was "Crack," and made with her the sublime style and copartnership of "Crack and Fling." Quite naturally, you see: Cora Ackworth and Felicia Ingram.

"I wonder what they would call me," Sally said once. "Anything, do you think?"

"That would depend: you'd have to earn it. There is n't much to make it out of. Stop, let's see! Why, your middle name is Punchard, is n't it? It's perfectly splendid! You'd be Spunk! That is, if you *were* spunky."

"I *would* be. Sally Punchard ought to be." And no knight of chivalry ever made his vow with more earnest devotion.

Felicia did not know a certain old story — or perhaps it had never made such impression upon her that she could recall it now — which came to Sally's mind and made her say this. And Sally did not tell it over again then.

She only asked, presently, as if asking it of herself, "I wonder if they did n't call *her* 'Spunk' ? Perhaps they did for a while, before she grew old ; but for anybody to call *my grandmother* anything but 'Madam Sally Punchard' !"

Felicia had gone now to New York. Her sister, ten years older, was married there, and was to take Felicia in charge for social training, for lessons and accomplishments. Altogether, Oakhaven and the copartnership had not done for the girl precisely what had been expected, which was not the fault of Oakhaven or Miss Wilcroft.

And Sally scarcely ate or slept at the Mansion House, so eager she was to get to the Wilcroft School, be fairly enrolled, take her place as one of "the girls," and begin her pranks.

Crack was there still, and she hoped for the high honor of her friendship. Felicia had promised to write about her and tell Crack she was coming. She even proposed to suggest the *sobriquet* which Sally longed to be decreed with ; but Sally said, valorously, "No, she would earn it."

"You'd better spell your name *i e*," said Felicia. "All the girls are getting to. I'm *Félicie* in New York. Lucie has started it for me. She's been *i e* for ever so long ; though it don't make much difference, unless you're very French and particular in the accent."

"No, I won't," said Sally, stoutly. "I won't have any *lie* tacked on to me, whatever I do. "I'll be Spunk if I can, but I won't be that. I was named for Grandma, and I'm Sally Punchard, and I'll stick to it."

"You can't at Oakhaven. You'll have to be *Sarah*, anyhow, on parade. Nicknames are against the rules. That's the very fun of 'em."

"They can't make me Sarah any more than they can make me Sapphira. And they won't try."

Sally said it quietly, but she meant it. She generally did mean things. Felicia saw that there was no danger but that she would begin on her spunk at once, and almost too thoroughly. Only the girls might not hit on that splendid combination with the middle name. Sally was afraid of it herself, and that was just why she said she would never "punch the Punchard at them."

Miss Wilcroft came to them in the parlor when Mrs. Gibson sent word modestly, without card, that they were there. Miss Wilcroft was very courteous; as much so to plain Mrs. Gibson of the Three Hill Farm at Rexford, as she had ever been to Dr. Ingram of Boston, or Mrs. Senator Ackworth of Birksfield. Mrs. Gibson was a mother leaving her child in her care. That was as much as any-body could be.

Miss Wilcroft was a lady of forty, perhaps. She wore what ladies of forty were apt to wear in those days, when neither dyeing nor gray hair was fashionable, — a cap and a glossy brown front. The brown front was quietly parted, and the cap was a neat little one tied under the chin, and ornamented in the lace border with rose-pink ribbons.

She was peculiarly nice and refined in word and manner; and she smiled a smile that in its sweetness had a look of rarity — one that a good school-girl would be glad to earn. But our Sally was not thinking just then of earning smiles.

Miss Wilcroft did not, in the girl's presence, talk the girl over with her mother. She rang the bell, and sent for Miss Southernwood, introduced the pupils to each other, and bade the elder take the new one to her room, which she would share, — No. 5, in the wing.

It sounded very fine to Sally. She was numbered, located. She belonged now. She was of No. 5, in the wing. If she had inherited an estate and title in England, she

would have felt no stronger impression of her place and dignity in the world.

If Miss Wilcroft had known quite thoroughly what Ellen Southernwood was, or what Sally Gibson's ambitions were, she might not have paired the room-mates as she did. But the wisest can only act from one standpoint of wisdom, commonly.

Miss Wilcroft knew Miss Southernwood for a well-mannered girl, tolerably subservient to the rules, only a little beyond her years in certain would-be-young-lady ways; fond of dress, and the company of the grown ones of the gayer sort, who dressed and visited most; apt to make acquaintance out of school, and get invited in the town.

Here was a simple country girl, fresh, bright, and independent. They would counterbalance each other as fairly as girls ordinarily could be made to do. It was not easy to arrange the intimate companionships of a dozen or fifteen couples according to the most perfect and salutary laws of influence and affinity. The man who had but *one* fox, goose, and basket of corn to defend from each other, had an easy time of it.

As the two passed up the staircase, a great bustle happened at the door. There was a loud ring, a rush from the sitting-room, a word quickly sent along from mouth to mouth until it echoed up the stairs, and a gathering at the balusters above of eager figures and faces.

"Crack's come!" was the cry; a little repressed, because of the law against nicknames; but the leniency of first days, and the unorganized interval in which term-rules waited their solemn and regular announcement, gave a liberty that there were enough to seize and use.

"Ah, Biddy! You're back, too! An' whaur's me Hie'lan' Laddie? I'm to have the same room, ain't I? She promised I should. No. 2, front corner!" Cora

Ackworth was giving her own directions to the porter-boy, when the stout form of the housekeeper appeared, moving grandly upon the scene from the unknown regions beyond the staircase below. Cora turned playfully, and embraced her portly figure. "Dread and delight of me life!" she called her, saucily.

If Sally Gibson had heard, or remarked, in the confusion of names and greetings, how that stately and benignant woman was addressed, she might have comprehended the point of Cora's first inquiry after her, and might *not* have done the extraordinary thing herself which she did do two hours later.

Cora came flying up the stairs, gave Miss Southernwood a whirl, kissed her, called her "Boy's love," and then drew her significantly back into a recess at the stair-head with a whisper. It evidently had to do with the new-comer. Crack was a girl to have a quick eye for the new ones, and a joke ready.

"Mind you *do*!" she cried, as they turned different ways along the passage. "I was in hopes there'd be one; of course I knew there would; but *handy*, you know. I've had *that* handy this half hour. Is n't it complete?"

"Crack, I don't believe I dare!"

"*Dare!*" repeated Crack. There is no especial type which will represent that mixture of incredulity, challenge, spur, and threatened contempt. But the school-girl ear translated it; and after that Nellie Southernwood did *not* dare to fail off, or to encounter, what it signified.

II.

Sally could hardly spare time to realize the parting with her mother, who was to return to Rexford by the noon stage. She cried a little, and there was a pitiful

ache at her heart for a minute, when she saw the black silk dress and the best shawl disappear so quietly out of the gateway and down the road; the dear mother walking off, lonely, to take her eight hours' journey, presently, without Sally; because Sally was to get such a six months' good here at the Young Ladies' Seminary of Oakhaven. Something twinged, too, with a fleeting sense of the difference between her mother's hope about it and her own. Yet she meant to study, and not to do anything that she or her mother could really be ashamed of.

Nell Southernwood took her over from the boarding-house to the Seminary building, — a pretty stone structure, set at the head of an ellipse of miniature park, fenced in with a walk around it; and at back and sides looking forth into a green, shady orchard space. Its four doors opened each way upon its four aspects.

Sally was shown through the great L-shaped school-room, filled with rows of desks, and including two of the wide orchard doors, glazed half-way; the gymnasium room, very simple in its appliances in those days, upon the opposite side; the music-room in the front corner, communicating, so that the piano was played for the marching exercises; the centre room, open to the high skylight, and railed above, making a gallery of the remaining extent of the upper floor, in whose four sides were ranged the benches and platforms used by the school upon its great examination day, when the arches of the windows and the rails of the balustrade were all hung with garlands of green and flowers.

“And we all have new dresses, and the whole town comes, and the hotel is full of friends of the girls; and the best scholars get the best of it then, though we have *our* fun all term-time. I don't belong to the prize-set, I may as well tell you. I go for a good time as I go

along. But when they come to the *music*, they can't do without me; and the music is in the evening, and the piano is on the platform in the corner of the L-room, all arbored 'over with green; and the seats and aisles are all just jammed with spectators, and the girls who play and sing have wreaths in their hair; and it is n't *everybody* that has a part that night."

And Miss Southernwood sat down to the open piano in the room where they had stopped, and rattled off an amazing quickstep. She was just plunging into a hurricane of variations, when a bell rang.

"My gracious me!" she exclaimed, starting up and flinging down a crashing chord by way of period. "That's dinner! I never heard the dressing-bell, did you? But we don't need to dress to-day. We're in our just-come gowns, and haven't been chalking on blackboards, or mending lead-pencils. Come!" And she hurried Sally down the avenue and in at the side piazza door. In the little cloak-lobby, before they reached the long room, she stopped.

"I forgot!" she exclaimed again; "I was to tell you of a rule. After Miss Wilcroft has said the blessing, the first girl on Miss Ferrington's right hand — that's the teacher at the opposite end of the table — is to rise and say a Scripture text. Something about food, or daily bread, or manna in the wilderness, or that sort; what we want, and what we get, you know. You'd better recollect something quick, for you'll as likely as not be the very one. The new ones are always put there. It'll be the next girl's turn to-morrow."

Sally's heart beat a little at this, plucky as she meant to be; and as the crowd of girls, nearly all arrived now, poured in and took places at the long table, finding their napkins, and their names upon their plates, and she dis-

covered hers at the very corner she apprehended, she felt the throb quite up in her ears and struggling with her breath.

The stout housekeeper sat at the middle of the opposite side ; before her two large dishes of broiled fish ; up and down, at intervals, were arranged cut loaves of bread. Covered dishes stood at the sides, but the fish and bread were all that were revealed.

Only one possible thing entered and took possession of Sally's head. She could remember nothing at that moment of the whole Bible, except the story of the loaves and fishes.

Heads were bent while Miss Wilcroft said the little prayer for blessing, and then came the instant's pause before the helping began.

Up like a rocket, in her desperation, sprang Sally Gibson, feeling that it must be done, and that she would not be silly and shamefaced at the very first thing.

"There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes ; but what are they among so many ?"

In a voice a little shrill with excitement, she repeated these words.

There was an awful start, and then a hush all down the table. Some girls flushed up ; some really turned pale ; all stared ; then an involuntary laughter broke forth, which, once yielded to, became almost a shout. Miss Wilcroft's rap upon the table silenced it.

"That will do," she remarked gravely. "You may sit down, Miss Gibson."

"I could n't think of anything else to save my life," said Sally, in a low, indefinite tone, and dropping into her chair, with her face in a scarlet flame.

A titter began again, and was again silenced.

"Miss Ladd, — we wait, — if you please," said Miss Wilcroft to the housekeeper.


That, then, was what she had done! And this was Miss Gibson's introduction to her schoolmates. Why had not Miss Wilcroft sent her away from the table? That would have been mercy. But she had to stay and eat her dinner, and bear those swift recurring bayonet-thrusts of twenty pairs of school-girls' eyes!

There was one girl yet more secretly uneasy than she, though not outwardly so abashed. Nell Southernwood knew that it would be seen through as a hoax, though Sally had unexpectedly done her part so much beyond perfection. The tracing of the joke would be direct enough.

Miss Southernwood found more than bones in her portion of fish that day, to make her eating difficult. As to Crack, she was in suppressed transports, without any mingling of fear at all. She was the leader and general of the pranking party; but who ever expected a general to come under fire, or to follow a poor little skirmisher into danger, to help him back to camp?

Half-way through dinner, a carriage was heard to drive up, and the hall-door was gently opened. A trunk was evidently set down within, and then the door closed, and that was all, until five minutes later, when a servant, dispatched by Miss Ladd, returned to her with answer that Miss Summerway had arrived.

"That was so like Louise!" Miss Wilcroft said, with a soft approval in her tone, as Miss Ladd informed her. "Gentle, unobtrusive, always. Will she come to dinner?" And just as she spoke, a tall, sweet-faced girl, in a dark lilac mousseline dress, stood for a second in the doorway, and in response to Miss Ladd's friendly beckoning passed round, with a modest salutation to the principal and Miss Ferrington, to a vacant place at the house-keeper's side.



An old scholar, by the smiles and nods of welcome, but slipping in so unpretentiously, so self-effacingly almost, in avoidance of any confusion for her sake.

Sally Gibson, glad of a new interest coming forward, found herself questioning, suddenly, which effect she really liked the best, — that of Miss Ackworth's dashing arrival, or this grace of quietness that marked Louise Summerway's. Sally had got to choose a style for herself.

She was at that facile age when girls of her temperament can choose any one of half a dozen styles — which may become, if persisted in, really character — as readily as they may adopt a fashion of handwriting; and sometimes they do successively and contradictorily adopt so many, that the character, or the handwriting, becomes a kind of polyscript.

Just now she was contrasting with grief Louise Summerway's lovely and commended bearing, inheriting its crown by its meekness, and her own remarkable exhibition of herself, which came by her ambition for readiness, prominence, and "spunk." But her ambition held her yet, and came uppermost presently again.

After dinner, Miss Wilcroft called her into her own sitting-room, and said to her, quietly, "I am quite sure, Miss Gibson, that you were partly, at least, the victim of a joke; and I cannot think that a perfect stranger would be guilty of a planned impertinence or an open irreverence. You did not know Miss Ladd's name?"

"No, indeed, ma'am," said Sally, earnestly, with her simple, country-bred breadth upon the double vowel.

"Nor did any one dictate that particular text to you?"

"No, indeed, ma'am," Sally said again. "I only could not possibly think of anything else when I saw the loaves and fishes. They said I must repeat something appropriate. But please don't ask me *who*," she added

quickly, "for I don't mean to be a telltale, if I *am* a fool!"

Miss Wilcroft could not help smiling. "I do not ask you. I am not anxious to begin with discipline so soon. But you may say," she added, gravely, "to whomever you think it may concern, that I shall ask the whole school who has originated it, if another such joke transpires."


Sally departed with a lightened heart. She met Miss Ladd in the hall, and walked straight up to her. "I did not know the least thing about it, Miss Ladd," she said. "I knew it was dreadful, anyway, but I was frightened off my head, and I could n't help saying it."

Miss Ladd laughed good-naturedly till her comely shoulders shook. Then she patted Sally's shoulder kindly. "We can afford to see the fun of it, my dear, though the fun must n't happen again; because the two small fishes were not quite all the Ladd had, you know, in this case. Some of our young ladies do not eat fish, and *some* of them do not quite so easily swallow a bait. Only don't go and set yourself up on a wrong pinnacle because you have made a new tradition in the school.

"Come to me, my dear, if you want to know about house rules. For seminary rules, go straight to Miss Wilcroft, or to one of the teachers. And for your own rules," she added, with a pleasant seriousness, "take them from the book where the story of the loaves and fishes is."

When Nell Southernwood and Cora Ackworth heard the sequel, they were moved to high approbation of their neophyte.

"She'll do," Crack said, nodding her emphasis. "She's got stuff. I'd call you Stuff right off, my dear," she remarked, patronizingly, as if offering knighthood; "but that means ugly and contrary, too. We had a Stuff here once, and everybody hated her, teachers and all."



The next morning, at the Seminary, the roll was called, the names were recorded, and the desks assigned. "Miss Gibson" rose promptly to the summons.

"Your full name?" asked Miss Wilcroft, as usual.

"Sally Punchard Gibson," was the distinct reply.

"*Sarah* Punchard Gibson," dictated the principal to Miss Ferrington, who was recording. "We do not use nicknames here, my dear," she said to Sally.

"It is n't a nickname, ma'am; it's my real name, the whole of it."

"Were you baptized 'Sally'?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'm named after my grandmother, Madam Sally Punchard. *She* was baptized Sally, and it's Sally on her gravestone."

The whole school was in a smile and rustle. It seemed as if Sally were fated to make a figure before it on each possible occasion.

"Write the name as the young lady gives it," Miss Wilcroft said, turning to her assistant to save her own composure.

"*Madame* Sally Punchard?" whispered Miss Ferrington, a little wickedly. Sally caught the whisper.

"I was n't baptized 'Madam,'" she said, gravely. "I did n't mean that."

"Your age?" Miss Wilcroft went on, abruptly, to be done with this young person, dangerous to the decorum of platform and benches.

"Fifteen last October." Then Miss Wilcroft had to ask the day, because Margeret Charney was also fifteen last October. And then Sally was placed, at last, between Nell Southernwood, who was sixteen, and Margeret Charney, in one of the rows of three, close by the east-orchard door, that stood pleasantly open this warm April day.

The call and numbering finished, and the rules read,

the dismissal came for the recess ; and it was then that Sally found her school title already attached to her.


"Come here, girls!" called out Crack, following with two companions from a row farther up on the same side, and running down the steps after them, as they went out into the orchard. "Let me introduce you to 'My Grandmother, Madam Sally Punchard.' We shall get a forshort for it, never fear ; it is n't going to be all that every time. And it won't be Granny, either, — if you don't act granny. Let me *catch* one of you calling her that!"

Crack gave the law. It was "My Grandmother," or "Madam Sally," or, for emphasis, "Madam Sally Punchard," after that. All in good part, and something, certainly, so far ; but why could n't they have thought of "Spunk"?

Sally Gibson was not the first candidate for honor or compliment who could think of something for herself that did not occur in time to other people.

III.

It does not take much material to make a "prank" out of at a girls' school. Laws begin low down in those early little communities. They hedge in to the inch ; the ell is a horror undreamed of ; nevertheless, without dreaming of, it is hedged *out*. We laugh, perhaps, to think what were our bounds and what were our trespasses in those days. It is only the yes or no of it, after all ; it is the question of faithfulness or unfaithfulness, merely ; and once a word was spoken from as far on above the little things of our whole life as we can speak from beyond our childhood now ; and it was said that to be faithful in those little first things was to be faithful in the large eternal ones.



Sally Gibson had not found out these wide relations yet, nor the depths of the reach of a true faithfulness.

It was the ruler's rule at Oakhaven to make as few laws as possible ; but if any escapade unprovided for by law, and not to be tolerated as a precedent, were committed, the constitution was speedily amended.

It was Sally Gibson's ambition to keep the constitution under as continual revision as possible. Pure fun it all was. She never did a radically wrong thing in it all. She scorned a meanness, and she was quick to feel what is at the basis of all law — the obligation to the general good. This was what would "bring her up all standing," sometimes, in the very midst of a mischief, or an adventure — such a little one as I will tell of presently.

Every teacher in the school liked her, almost against school-conscience ; every scholar, good or bad, was more or less bewitched with her. The scapegrace set claimed her, but could not always hold her ; the steady ones wished she would belong more avowedly to them.

Who could make rules against what could never be successfully attempted more than once ? Or who could tell where the lightning would flash out next ? What use was there in legislating about strings and hooks fastened secretly to bed-clothing, or to wrists and ankles of sleeping girls, and the lines carefully trained along under rugs or furniture to the doorways, so that at midnight, shrieks and shouts of fright, anger, and fun resounded through the corridors ? Or to prevent half a dozen bed-slats being withdrawn from every bedstead in a row of rooms, so that one after another would tumble into noisy confusion the moment the lights were put out, and the first stillness of closed doors had settled upon the dormitories ?

And what ordinance was violated when, according to requirement, all the girls having covered their text-books

with "substantial material," Sally appeared at lesson after lesson with such illustrative ornamentation upon hers as sent the classes into but half-subdued convulsions?

Her botany was gorgeous with a flora that never was indigenous to any zone between the poles, — impossible blossoms cut from furniture chintzes; her geography was rampant with tigers, crocodiles, anacondas, white bears promiscuous among icebergs, palm-trees, and pyramids.

Her history had on one side a confusion of original and applied devices, — the lion and the unicorn, in brilliant colors, fighting for the crown; crosses and crescents interlocked and struggling; caricatures of teachers and pupils as martyrs in rows at opposite stakes; thrones rocking like cradles, and sceptres flying through the air like darts; and the whole opposite cover emblazoned with the stars and stripes, with a bird of freedom crowing at the top.

Her astronomy was resplendent with a solar system in gilt paper and India ink; a jolly fat Sun sitting in the middle, with flaming hair, and outstretched, pudgy arms waving on his planets; the planets, on strenuous little legs, scampering and somersaulting along their orbits; the far-off fixed stars shown as grotesque little winking eyes, and a comet blazing among the whole, with a tail whisking around the back binding.

Remonstrated with, she only stated, gravely, that "it was such a good way to tell them apart; if they were all in smooth brown linen, like Miss Summerway's, she should always be bringing the wrong book; and she thought she would have them as appropriate as she could."

There could be no enactment as to the style of placing a French verb upon the blackboard that would forefend the inspiration that seized her one day when *Monsieur Bienlassé* was absent, and Miss Ferrington had the class,

— to strike off her pronoun for the first person singular in the outline of the upper part of a face, — and follow on with the next parts of the tense in upright, streaming lines, like monsieur's hair, — making the last ones curve gradually down and around, till a graceful looped letter of the closing word, and her own name signed beneath, whose crooked initial served for mouth and chin, met together in rough outline of a high, old-fashioned stock and coat-collar, — and completed a clever profile sketch of the old professor's head.

It was as useless to follow her with edicts as to follow a bird with a noosed string. She scorned the poverty of repetition in the letter of her jokes; the spirit was unhinderable.

One afternoon, the four great doors stood open upon avenue and orchard, and through the vacant halls and rooms, and among the out-door nooks, the girls were playing hide-and-seek. Sally Gibson was hid repeatedly, and never found. She would emerge in some stealthy manner when all were tired, and come walking along in open view; and when demanded of, tumultuously, where she had been, would say, "in her invisible cloak."

"Just like her!" some girls said; and others, "Like her to go invisible? She's the *visiblest* girl that ever came to Oakhaven!" Right enough, both ways, and further than they meant.

She was hidden now for the fourth time; and at this present moment she was nearer breaking a known rule and making a moral trespass than she had ever been yet, though she had done more startling things. She had got *behind* a rule, and had there encountered a sudden and irresistible little temptation.

There was a tall hedge across the head of the flower-garden which lay beneath the windows of the Long Room,

and formed part of the pleasure grounds for the pupils. Behind this hedge, and closed in again beyond, and from the orchard, by a board fence which extended at right angles from a line of wood-sheds to the outside wall, was a sort of kitchen yard and drying-ground, into which, or "through the hedge," as the rule worded it, it was forbidden to go. There was no known temptation to do so; and besides, it was too completely overlooked by three tiers of windows for any one to venture, if there had been.

Sally had come across from the orchard to the wood-sheds. It was no new thing for the girls to hide in the corners of these in their favorite evening game. But Sally — who but she? — had climbed a diminished wood-pile; had let herself down behind it, and discovered there a partly loose board in the back closing. Through this she had slipped, pressing the board again to its fitting, where it stayed firmly enough till pulled off or pushed upon; and she stood there in an angle of the house with the outbuildings, exactly corresponding to one made in like manner upon the front side of the shed. A low area door opened out here, which she had never seen before; otherwise, she considered not her whereabouts, until, at her third hiding, she peeped around the house-corner, and discovered that before her lay the interdicted little square "beyond the hedge."

She had set no foot into it; she had drawn back to her watching; and hearing presently the sound of the hunt raging afar off, had emerged as before, and skirted the field to meet it. But at this fourth time she had no sooner slipped through her panel than a delicious spicy odor met her nostrils, keen with the hunger of a school-girl at almost tea-time. Upon the area ledge outside the sunken door, which was safely shut, stood a pan heaped up with ginger cookies, just cooling from the oven.

Would it be very bad? It would be great fun! To come out from her invisibility this last time with such a visible miracle! To treat the girls, only a little beforehand, with what of course was made and meant for them, and could at any rate only be eaten once! It was like grapes of Eshcol! She did not stop to think further; the door might open at any moment; that, indeed, was the splendor of the achievement. She went down one step; she stooped; she reached; she grasped, — once, twice, three times, — as many as her hand could hold.

She filled the crown of her sun-bonnet, that hung upon her arm, and hurriedly retreated. She could have passed easily through the little gap between the last old stems of the hedge and the house, gone unchallenged through the flower-garden, and met her puzzled companions serenely from the front. But she stopped there. The curious ethics of a school-girl's mind withheld her from crossing the interdicted little square. She was virtually within it; she was just where she knew the rule was meant to prevent them from trespassing; but she had not been "through the hedge." No; she kept her probity, struggled back through the narrow board opening, climbed the wood-pile, skirted the orchard fence, and darted across to the old, bent apple-tree! Three minutes later, the girls, returning from a fruitless quest beyond the seminary building, found her quietly sitting in the arm-chair crotch of the tree, with her hands folded over a lapful of ginger cookies.

"I'm waiting to treat," she said. "What a time you have been! Here! and here! and here!" and she tossed the cookies into the readily upstretched hands.

"Where did they come from? Why, they're hot! Grandmother Punchard, where *have* you been?" the girls ejaculated, eagerly.

"I've been — an awful sinner, I expect. But a saint would have sinned. I was invisible, and the cookies were made manifest. I vent — I vided — I viced; I went — I saw — I grabbed!"

"Well, they won't went round at tea-time, that's all," said Crack, beginning on a second. "There ain't enough *per*-vided. *That's* the vice of it! Old Scott makes just so many in a pan, and just two panfuls. Cookies always come after fruit; big cakes when there is n't any sauce. Fifteen strawberries apiece, and after them a ginger. Only they won't go round."

Sally looked suddenly crestfallen. "I did n't suppose they counted them," she said.

"Of course they do," said Nell Southernwood, maliciously. "You're in for it." And she helped herself again.

Sally drew the sun-bonnet away and put her elbow out over it.

"I did n't mean *that*," she said, with deep contempt. "I did n't know there would n't be a plenty."

"There is, for *us*," said Cora Ackworth, trying to put Sally's arm aside and reach the plunder again.

"Nobody shall have another one!" cried Sally, crumpling the fresh white cambric together, and closing it between her two resolute hands like a bag. "And none of *us* — where are you all? — need take any to-night at the table."

Crack laughed — a laugh that said things that words would have been ashamed to say. It told Sally that she had done what could not be mended, let her be ever so high and determined.

Her eyes flashed. "*I* don't steal people's suppers!" she exclaimed. And she stood upon the foot-rest of a lower limb, still guarding her crushed-up bonnet defiantly.

"Where's your treat, then?" cried Crack, with her mocking laugh again. "And how are we to manage going without two or three apiece, — to straighten things and pacify your conscience, — when we sha'n't have a chance at more than one? The sum won't prove."

"My treat was the beforehand — and the fun. But there's *no* fun in a mean thing. Let me down!" and she struggled with Cora, who had climbed the branch beside her.

"You can't help it now," repeated Crack. Sally pushed at her vehemently. Crack braced herself against the arm-chair crotch, and laughed on. "Yes, you can," she said. "You can treat the sufferers next time; or out of your next box from home; or with your candy money when the old man comes round. You can put all their names down, as particular as you please. But if the cookies begin at my end of the table, I shall have to take one, if it's only not to look like having lost my appetite. It's those that don't want cake to-night that'll be found out!" Sally ignored the last half of that speech.

"As if you could make up things that way!" she said. "They'd have had both, and you know it. One thing don't put back another."

"What a fuss about a cookie!" said Nell Southernwood. "You did n't know they were counted. We've a right to our board; and that means, I guess, being fed when you're hungry. It's your own scrape, and you might as well hold on to the glory of it. I'd be one thing or the other if I were you."

Angry tears came to Sally's eyes.

Crack thought they had her at advantage, and spoke again. Crack never "got mad."

"You're a curious one," she said. "And you've got a funny sort of spunk for a girl that can begin so spunky!"

Sally was struck silent for an instant. The very word she had been waiting for came now, not with intended honor, but reproach. "I've got my grandmother's spunk," she said then, loftily, and quietly stepped, rather than jumped, down from the low limb upon the grass. "I'm going to Miss Ladd."

"No! Stop!"

"You need n't be afraid. I'm the only one that's lost my appetite. *You* won't be found out."

"Keep her! Stop her!" Cora called, as Sally walked away. "Tell us first what your grandmother's spunk was."

"You'll see. I'll tell you when you can understand," said Sally, without looking round.

IV.

Sally had to cross the orchard, for the old apple-tree was around the seminary corner at the back. As she came into the avenue, she saw Miss Wilcroft go from it into the house by the side piazza-door, and at the same moment the clock gave the single stroke. It must be half-past six. She was too late. The bell must be just going to ring. But the bell did not ring. It was five minutes too late itself that night. A very breathless little person ran into the housekeeper's room, and Miss Wilcroft passed on into her own.

There was a basket of jumbles that night for the "little girls' elbow," as a right-angled addition to the upper end of the long table was called. Miss Ladd glanced at Miss Wilcroft as the dishes were passed.

"There was some mistake about the cookies," she said "Scott had not quite so many as usual."

Miss Wilcroft smiled and bent her head.

"There have been mistakes about several things, I think," she said, with a significance.

Miss Ladd had not broken Sally Gibson's counsel, any more than Sally had confessed for any but herself. The housekeeper was a lady of broad faith, who believed in the first thing for a forgiver to do being to help the forgiven out of trouble. She got that command and its comfort out of her New Testament and the Lord's Prayer.

There was plenty of cake for all. Sally thought one of the mistakes had been about the counting of the cookies; for even of them there would have been certainly one apiece. Every girl tranquilly took her share except herself. Neither at that tea nor for ten more did she appropriate her part. The orderly ones may have guessed that she was in penance for something not transpired. The disorderly ones thought they knew all about it.

There were three persons who really understood, and they without exchange of word or notice. Even Miss Ladd did not know that it had been Miss Wilcroft herself who stopped the bell just as Hannah was ringing it, and made the tea five minutes late. And the "making up" was a wholly voluntary atonement on Sally's part. Sally did one other little justice while she was about it. She counted her strawberries, and found the fifteen to be nine and twenty. She took pains to tell Crack Ackworth so.

It was a pity the good set was beginning to give her over to the reprobates, for the reprobates were beginning not to know exactly what to do with her.

Two nights after, as the bell rang for evening study, Sally was hurrying from the Seminary with a lexicon she had forgotten to bring before, and Miss Wilcroft met her in the avenue. She stopped her in the shadow of the linden-trees.

"My dear," she said kindly, laying her hand upon her

shoulder, "will you tell *me* what your grandmother's spunk — that seems to have been your inheritance — was?"

It all flashed upon Sally in an instant. Miss Wilcroft had come through the Seminary while she had crossed the orchard. She had been in her own little gallery room that almost overlooked the apple-tree. She had heard — perhaps seen — how much of it?

"It was all my fault, ma'am," she burst forth eagerly. "You won't lay it to the rest?"

"I think not," said Miss Wilcroft, with an amused application of the word. "They do not seem to have inherited it, or its like. — It's your grandmother, my child, whom I should like to hear about. Will you tell me?"

"Yes, ma'am," was the reply to that, in a subdued way for Sally Gibson, but with an undertone of pride for Madam Punchard. It was comfortable to have her grandmother to lean back upon. She felt very small just then, for herself.

She picked herself up, as it were, by Madam Sally Punchard's dignity, as a cipher in the unit place may borrow one from a ten, when it finds itself subtracted from.

"It was my grandmother that I was named for," she said. "Madam Sally Punchard. She lived in New York State in the time of the Revolution, when the fighting was all up and down there, and a piece of the country would be sometimes in the hands of the Continentals and sometimes of the British, and sometimes of anybody that could ravage, and skirmish, and spy, — tories and cowboys and everything. And my grandfather," she went on rapidly, warming with her narrative, and half forgetting what had called it up, — "my grandfather, Colonel Punchard, was away with the army. Madam Sally had to keep the house, that was in a lonely place, away from the town, on a big farm. The nearest other house was half a mile away;

but a little further from there was quite a settlement of a lot of people all family related ; and Grandmother Punchard looked to them for neighbors in case anything happened ; only she was n't very sure of getting at them just when she wanted them most.

"She had all the money, and the silver, and my grandfather's letters and papers hidden away ; and they only used pewter spoons and things, for fear of the marauders.

"Well, one night the marauders came ; and my grandmother and Palmyra, her colored maid, were all alone ; so they met the men at the door, and grandmother looked so calm and cool, and Palmyra held her turban up so high and proud, as if she was only the head one of a whole lot of servants, men and women, that the leader of the gang, who pretended to be a British officer, took off his cap.

"Grandmother and Palmyra had both made up their minds beforehand what to do if such a thing happened, only they had made them up different ways.

"Palmyra stepped to the door of the empty sitting-room, and began to ask 'Mr. Jim' if he was there.

" 'What is that for, Palmyra,' my grandmother said.

" 'I 'se lookin' fer de cunnel's o'd'ly, ma'am,' says she. 'Don't yer tink he's bes' step en let de cunnel know dere's cump'ny come?'

" 'Palmyra,' says my grandmother ! 'a lie won't save us, but the Lord may.'

"And then she told the leader of the men that the things were there, and there was nobody to hinder, but he'd have to look for them.

"He said he should n't *look* long without asking her ; he'd give her just half an hour to think about it, while his men got something to eat, and picked up what was lying round, and then he meant to be off.

"And my grandmother did n't say another word, but

walked away into a little end room, and carried a light in with her, and sat down and read her Bible. And the light was a sign to the house that was half a mile off; and the people there put up *their* signal, and before the robbers had got all they wanted, ten men on horseback rode into the yard, and more were coming! and the plunderers were all taken, that's all."

"Thank you. I think, my dear, that you will find your grandmother's spunk a very good corrective for what school-girls are apt to mistake for the quality. Perhaps you have not *begun* quite right here, in all things, Sally!"

She dismissed her without even a word about anything more, and nothing more was ever heard of it. She said to herself, — the wise lady, — "The girl has a better reprover than I could be; and a better leaven for the rest than exposures and punishments. There's enough grandmother in her to set her right, and to work wider in the end, if the girls without grandmothers don't get, meanwhile, where I shall be forced to interfere."

The most unfortunate result of the whole occurrence was that Sally got her name by it. The "girls without grandmothers" found it good policy to admire — as if they could appreciate — the real nobleness into which her mettle had blazed; to drop, also, the "Madam Punchard" reminder, which stirred too high a loyalty for their regular convenience. They were really grateful, too, for her stanch bearing of the whole blame, and of what they believed the imposed penalty. They began to call her "Spunk" and "Spunkie," without the "Grandmother," and Sally felt bound to live up to it.

Anything that called for clear daring, without essential unfaithfulness or meanness, they knew they could at any time put her up to; and at most times she did not wait for putting up. But when they had a real scheme of their

own to further, they often had to get her share of the work done through some withholding or pretense.

Thus Sally was involved in several matters, the whole extent of which was never confided to her, and concerning which a quiet vigilance was being kept by the authorities of the school.

The summer deepened; the long, hot evenings and nights came. Studies were given up after eight o'clock, and the girls were allowed as much wholesome liberty as they could take without exceeding into unwholesomeness.

Once in a while, one or two were permitted to "take tea out," at Dr. Archer's, or Judge Lewis's, or at Madam Wilcroft's cottage. Miss Wilcroft herself would sometimes invite a pupil to accompany her to her mother's on an informal visit.

These were great privileges, and the accepting of invitations to good houses "in the town" could not always be withheld, even from those girls who would encroach upon their opportunity.

Commencement came on at Anmouth, a half-day's trip up the river; and several students who had sisters, or cousins, or acquaintances in the school at Oakhaven, and were often in town, would be there now for the vacation, either at their homes, or visiting the residents.

John Archer, whose sister Fanny was a day scholar at Miss Wilcroft's, and Gorham Lewis, who was cousin to the Archers, were to have for guests Dick Southernwood and Harry Ackworth, brother and cousin respectively to Cora and Nell.

Miss Wilcroft had a ticklish tiller to hold, in those days, to steer faithfully, impartially, wisely, her boat and its sprightly company among the stumps and shallows, and against the risky currents.

Endless were the devices and combinations made by

certain of these insiders and outsiders to meet frequently together. The claims of relationship were unanswerable ; but these relationships were so easily and large-heartedly exchanged !

Every year there was more or less of this. Rules and conditions were imposed and evaded. Hours were exceeded, even to the incurring of penalties in denials to succeeding pleasures.

It had been more than suspected that surreptitious excursions were planned and made, and that much intercourse not to be approved or allowed for school-girls in their term-time, away from home, and in the mixed association of numbers, had gone on, in spite of the most solicitous watchfulness that could be maintained without being suspicious and suggestive.

Miss Wilcroft entered, this year, with somewhat more than usual apprehension, what she called the meteoric field of her annual orbit.

It was at about this time, and upon the arrival of a new pupil, that she had judged it well to make some changes in rooms and room-mates, which were not quite comprehended, in their policy, by the school at large.

Sally Gibson was removed from the room she had shared with Ellen Southernwood, and put in what the girls knew as "the cherry-tree bedroom," a little single-bedded apartment in the far corner of the wing, which had been carefully closed since occupied a year before by Miss Praid, the teacher of English Literature, who had been succeeded by Miss Porter, a resident of Oakhaven.

Cora Ackworth was placed with Nell, — an arrangement they had been "dying for for ages," when they had not been "dying" separately for permission to occupy "the cherry-tree room."

Perhaps it was easier to keep her eye on the two

together, in some ways ; perhaps, also, Miss Wilcroft recognized something of the principle enunciated by the old lady who approved a certain desperate sort of marriage between two persons, each undesirable for anybody else to marry, — that “ it was better than to spoil *two* families.”

As to Sally, Cora and Nell were quite wild over her unaccountable good luck, and reckoned securely upon sharing its advantages. The cherry-tree was a perfect Jack’s Beanstalk of opportunity. Its stout, gnarled limbs grated their boughs against the very clapboards and window-sill, when a wind blew ; and down below, the rugged trunk leaned close to the low roof of the very shed through which Sally had found her way to the Debatable Land and the placer of ginger cookies. Besides, the room was on the further side of the wing stairway, and opened at its very head.

“ You don’t *know* your chances ! ” Crack had said to Sally, the day the latter was moving in her boxes.

Miss Wilcroft had quietly stepped in beforehand.

“ My dear,” she said to Sally, “ I have to ask a promise of you. I am sure you will enjoy this room, and I give you every liberty in and about it consistent with the established rules. But I know you will be quick enough to discover its availabilities for fun, and I ask you, plainly, to say that you will never climb — either up or down, or let any one else do so — that cherry-tree ! It is an extraordinary request to make of a young lady, but I make it ; and you promise ? ”

Sally looked out into the cherry-tree, giving it full consideration.

“ I may n’t sit there in the branches and study ? ”

“ No.” Another pause.

“ Suppose the house catches fire ? ” she asked, gravely, as one who must take in all contingencies.

"I do not ask you to reenact Casabianca," Miss Wilcroft answered, as gravely. "I will take your word of honor for the keeping of the spirit of my request, and trust you for any severe and uncalculated emergency."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Sally; and from that moment—as Miss Wilcroft knew she would—felt herself bound.

V.

The 21st of June was always, weather permitting, an excursion holiday. School was suspended, and a party made of teachers and scholars, to Thunder Glen, Tomahawk Mountain, or over the river to Widefield and the lake. It came in well as a safety-valve for the dangerous season of accumulated electricities.

For days beforehand the restless ones were quieter, satisfied with the plans in prospect, fearing to forfeit them, and less tempted to contrive for themselves.

Sally was at this time just settled in her room, and that novelty pleased and satisfied her. She had not tired yet of lawful occupations in that shaded window, where the scarlet-fruited boughs thrust themselves in at her, till the bright little globes were all gone as far as her arms and her visitors' could reach among them, and only the pleasant leaves stayed to keep her summer company, and fan and whisper to her in the wind.

Louise Summerway had been in to see her. Miss Ladd, truly, had suggested this,—for Sally little knew, any more than the rest of us, how the forces of right and hope and kindness were at work for her; and it was apropos of some new knotted wool-work for fancy mats, that all the girls who liked pretty feminine finger-craft were busy with, and that Sally had taken to with the zeal that characterized all her takings.

So Miss Summerway had sat with her for an hour on Wednesday afternoon, in the cherry-tree window, and Sally had really felt lifted up into an ambition of higher companionship; for she had found Louise simple and sweet, and not "high-righteous," as the frolickers called her; and Louise had found Sally bright and worth while.

Crack and her coterie began to be dismayed.

"She's turning pious," they said. "She has n't cut up a dido for nearly a week. 'T won't do. We must get her into something, or she'll be out of everything." And they knew they could not spare her wits or her intrepidity.

For good reasons of her own, Miss Wilcroft did not divulge the intended direction of the party until the evening of the day before.

Whether it were to be mountain, glen or lake, or some quite new exploration, was the exciting uncertainty. But before the days of electric telegraphy, signals were possible; and even from behind the fences of a boarding-school there are ways enough; and there were those interested who knew, almost as soon as the pupils themselves, that Thunder Glen was the destination of the company on this particular 21st.

Now Thunder Glen was just about equidistant, though not upon the direct road, between Anmouth and Oakhaven; and it was graduation day at Anmouth on the 20th.

There was a question of dress for the picnic. Miss Wilcroft advised, as usual, plain, strong, white gowns, and most wore them; but Cora Ackworth appeared in buff linen, and was fine with a butterfly brooch and broad filigree bracelets of Berlin iron. Ellen Southernwood had a rose-colored jaconet.

"Why don't you wear your blue?" they asked of Sally.

"You look a great deal nicer in it. You always get so red, you know."

Sally got a little red at once. "I like my dimity," she said.

"And her blue is *best*," said Nell Southernwood, who had a dozen summer dresses, and knew that Sally had but a third as many.

"'Tis n't that," said Cora, with more disdain. "She wants to walk in white among the worthy. Let her try."

If Sally wanted to "walk in white," she would try to do it when nobody was by. Crack's speech kept her more aloof from her beginnings of friendship with the white ones than any coaxing could have done. Besides, she had a horror of what she called "flapjacking," which was the thing that a more legitimate use of language would term apostasy. She had chosen her style and party; she would not suddenly turn or desert.

So she was with the "colored people," as they called themselves, when they got apart from the rest a little way among the bowlders and crags of Thunder Glen.

Cora, who was as clever at drawing as Ellen Southernwood at music, perched herself on a lone, unsharable point, with her sketch-book, to get a view of Little Ferny Fall.

She was quite conspicuous to the whole party, though separated from them, as they gathered mostly in the wide, cool, cavern-like space below the fall, upon the big, smooth rock, over whose face the calming water lapsed in gentle overflow, or found trickling channels in its worn clefts. Nobody thought that that leading spirit of mischief could be better placed than she had chosen to place herself.

Nell Southernwood's dress was just visible by a floating fold over the round of rock below where Cora sat; and along the tangled marginal bank of the waterfall, Sally Gibson, Margeret Charney, and others, were gathering mosses and ferns that dripped and waved in its very edges.

Nobody but one or two — and Sally Gibson least of all — knew or suspected that there had been any covert meaning in the buff and rose color; that the flutter of their distinguishing tints had served as guide to other eyes and footsteps, and that, in the shade of the thick, low, cedar copse that overgrew the shoulder of hill from which Cora's rock projected, and quite near enough for the girls' low tones to reach, and their ears to catch reply, were already comfortably placed a group of the other persons, who had, of course, as good a right to search and track old Thunder Glen as the Seminary party had.

And what if there were? Two were but brother and cousin after all, and the third a friend of these, who had come riding over the upland from the high-road, and had tied their horses out in the pasture margin of the wood.

They could not have been openly invited, though, and the fun was in their being there without it; in sitting and chatting with the young girls, so demurely occupied, almost in the face and hearing of authority which they delighted to deal with as a great deal more despotic than it really was. It was so audacious, and yet so cleverly secure.

There was only one way to climb directly to the thicket from the water-side, and that was by the narrow shelvy path that led to just where the two young ladies had fixed themselves, and where nobody, of course, could pass while they remained.

Nobody knew of the walk through the cedars when Cora and Nell disappeared from their high places and chose the long way round, coming in among their companions a little while after from the under-ledge path upon the north.

And nobody understood, when one of those quick, heavy afternoon showers, that happen any summer day, drove them all hurriedly to the big hay-rigging, and then forced

them to a refuge in the first farm-house on their way, — how it was that the same necessity sent four horseback riders just after them into the farmer's barn, whence he hospitably brought them into the great kitchen to get their share of the drying, where shawls and sun-bonnets were being spread beside the fire.

Thunder and lightning and wildly-pouring torrents kept them a good two hours; during which the unavoidable was politely made the matter-of-course; and John Archer, and Richard Southernwood, and Harry Ackworth, and Mr. Oldridge, the newly-introduced stranger, talked and laughed openly with governesses and pupils, assisted them in all sorts of courteous ways, watched and reported the weather, helped them up at last into the hay-wagon, lifted their hats as the vehicle got lumberingly under way, and then sprang upon their steeds and caracoled gayly beside, before, and behind them, along the gleaming wet roads and under the dripping branches in the golden light of the rain-sweet sunset.

Crack and Nell had to tell somebody or die; so they told Sally Gibson. What was the use of their clever trick, indeed, except to explain the cleverness afterward, and get it admired?

But Sally did not admire quite so enthusiastically as they had expected. She did not seem to envy at all. In fact, she looked just a little bit disgusted. She liked girl-fun and rule-dodging; but a certain delicacy of her homely training made her think it not so funny to circumvent when young persons of the opposite division of creation were concerned and concurrent.

"John Archer did not come till afterward," Nell Southernwood remarked. "He rode out to meet them half-way. It was Fan that fixed it all. She sent my note to Longbridge by the early stage this morning; and when

John got there Dick had left word that they were gone round to Thunder Glen to meet the picnic. John knew *he* was n't asked; and he got his lunch, and then came plodding back to the Six Corners. John is slow; a real honest old poke, like the doctor."

"I like John Archer," Sally Gibson said.

"Well, *that's* straightforward!" cried the two girls, and stared at her.

"She'll never do it in all the world, I don't believe," said Nell Southernwood, with miserable syntax and yet more miserable accent. "She's got an awful sober side to her when it gets uppermost, and it's uppermost now, it seems to me."

"We must get *her* in some scrape first," said Cora.

"We've only two days to do it in," was the reply.

"Five," said Cora. "I don't care so much for Saturday; but Tuesday I *will* go, if I never enter the old sem again!"

"Don't you imagine" —

"Hush!" interrupted Crack, peremptorily. "I *am* imagining. Don't speak till I get through. It's just dawning."

She sat down on the floor, put her elbows on her knees and her fingers in her ears, and shut her eyes, as she was apt to do at a hard place in a lesson.

Nell stood stock-still and let it dawn. In two minutes, Cora flew to her feet again.

"She shall help us, and she sha'n't know it! Then if she does n't have to help us again, my name's not Crack Ackworth!" And Crack snapped all her fingers over her head, like a pair of castanets.

"Saturday night is Midsummer Eve, — did you know it?"

"No."

"Thought you did n't. And that's the Eve of St. John. Know that?"

"No."

"Knew you did n't. It's the night for tricks, and signs, and ghosts, and dreams. Ever hear of 'Midsummer Night's Dream'?"

"That's in Shakespeare."

"So's everything."

I have not room, in telling this little story, to say all my own say. Perhaps the say of these girls is of even less value. I must, at any rate, pass over most of it to its result.

"It won't do," said Crack, as a finality, "to talk to her about husbands — and trash. Tell her she'll dream out the next ten years, and all the luck and happening of them, for herself and her 'folks,' as she calls them. And tell her the imps are all out, and she won't dare. That'll fire her up to it. And the imps *will* be out — some of 'em!"

So the Eve of St. John, with its traditions and omens, was talked over in the regulation "mile walk" that next afternoon, between the three; and it was absolutely asserted that if anybody had the spunk — "and here's Spunkie!" Crack interpolated — to go through the prescribed forms, they could behold and read in a vision the whole story of ten years to come, concerning themselves and their friends.

"But it would be like looking over to the end of a book," Sally demurred, "would n't it? I think the interest would be all used up. There might be dreadful things, besides, you know."

"Oh," said Crack, supplementing with ready wit, "in these kind of visions you are n't obliged to *look* any longer

than you like. You can dream one thing all out and drop another. They come just as fast as you — sort of — ask for them. Did n't you ever manage a dream? Spin it out, or turn over and change it? Well, you can always do that at Midsummer Eve; only what you *do* dream will be certain true. But it's the *charm* part I don't believe you'd dare to do. I don't believe *I* should."

"Poh!" said Spunkie.

"I'll bet you half a pound of gumdrops you would n't," said Nell.

"Poh!" said Spunkie again, whether in contempt or acceptance, they could hardly tell. But they left it there, being tolerably sure she would do it, for the daring if not for the drops. If she did not, they had another way, though they would rather not be driven to it.

It would probably lose them their Tuesday plan.

It would be taking beforehand what they meant to beg for then; but this they had little hope about, anyhow, unless Sally's new soberness was broken up, and she were "tuned to concert pitch" for the occasion.

VI.

In the last hour,—between eleven and twelve,—*without speaking or looking over her shoulder,—to go out of the house, leaving the doors a crack ajar behind her; to walk straight to the well, draw up some water, and drink out of the palm of the left hand; to put a pinch of salt upon her tongue, which—the salt—she should have carried in the thumb and finger of her right; to go—still without turning—to the nearest fruit-tree or bush, pick a fruit and eat it while she counted a hundred backwards; walk round the tree three times,—always keeping her face in the same direction, and never glancing to the right*

or left, — there was no knowing what she might not see or have happen to her if she did, — then to come back. That, in brief, was the prescription as they gave it to her.

What they prescribed for themselves at the same time, without mentioning it to her, was also, in brief, this : —

To have leave to take early tea at the Archers ; there, a walking party would be improvised to go over Round Top through the Pine Avenue by moonlight. To run home at eight o'clock, — when this plan should be set on foot, — and “get leave” — of each other ; to be seen, thus, at this hour, apparently returned for the night ; to slip out again, by ways they knew, and join their friends at the foot of the park. To come back as might happen, — they would have a delicious wide margin for their hours, — to say good-by to the party at the entrance to the seminary grounds, pass around to the basement door in the wing, and there conceal themselves to wait until Sally should go out, “not looking over her shoulder,” and “leaving the door a crack ajar.”

“It would be something to tell of till they were gray !” Crack said.

It was settled at school with Fanny Archer on Friday afternoon. She was to have the outside management. There were to be Dick and Harry, of course, Gorham Lewis and the quiet Olivers, brother and sister, next neighbors to the Archers, “for ballast,” Fanny said. She knew very well that quiet John must see some such make-weight in it, or he would not help it through. The “leave,” too, was to be asked for his sake.

The Archers' mother was not living ; the doctor was busy day and night ; and John was at once mother and elder brother to this only sister, who gave him, it must be owned, enough to do.

Cora and Nell looked in, at the cherry-tree room, as they went off for their tea-visit.

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"How is it to be about the 'Midsummer Dream,' Spunkie?" they asked.

Sally looked up with a flash in her eyes. "I'll tell you Monday," she said. Then they knew she would do it.

"May be we'll tell you Monday, too," said Crack; — and they ran back along the corridors, and, in full permission and fearlessness, down the front staircase and out at the front door.

With all her own invention, quickness, and merry mischief, Sally Gibson was the most innocent of young human beings as to the trickiness which accomplished its own ends by putting the risk of their accomplishment upon other people. She was thorough and honest in every game and project; she played her part precisely as agreed upon. She had made up her mind to try this prank, and she would be certain to try it full and fair.

There would be two doors for her to unfasten and pass through; one at the foot of the wing staircase, and opening upon the landing of a short flight to the basement entrance, then the outer door in this lower passage. The well was around the corner, at the back, a few paces from the end of the house; she would have to go forty yards beyond, into the orchard, and get a green apple.

It would be queer if she should not dream after all that, especially the apple. But Eve was strong in her, and so was her grandmother; there was no harm in it, as far as she could see, unless to herself; and eleven o'clock found her up and watching, in her little brown double-gown, and her bedroom slippers, soft, warm, and noiseless.

She flitted along the passages, and down the staircase in the stillness; not without that eerie feeling that one has in the most familiar places, when out of one's snug nest in the night time. She left the doors, in the breathless

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June air, a crack ajar. The bolts slipped easily; Crack had told her they did, and Crack knew; it had been her care that they should, more than once before now. She and her comrades were daring more, though, now, than they had ever dared before; and comrades were fewer this term; in an escapade of this sort Cora and Nell had only themselves and Sally Gibson's spunk — if they could enlist or entrap that — to depend upon.

She passed, with a growing beat and flutter in her bosom, from the porchway to the well. She never looked behind, or *thought* behind, to suspect or discover two other figures that emerged from their narrow hiding beyond the little porch, and slipped themselves *in*. She drew the water with steady hands, notwithstanding the grains of salt held tight in thumb and finger. She knew she must, or betray the movement by a shaking windlass or a clattering bucket. It came up, cool and dark, from the cool, dark depths, and she swung it noiselessly to the damp, soft rest-board. She dipped her left hand in; — what was that sound in the house behind her?

A great rattle, and crash and smash, it seemed; as if a tin or a china closet had spilled itself inside out, this night of imps and witchery. It was only one tin pail, that the housemaid had left standing at the corner of the upper step, upon the landing. Sally, in her close double-gown, had come safely by. Two, in full muslin skirts, had swept hurriedly up abreast, in single eagerness each for herself, and the house was startled.

Not for a moment or two, however. It takes a minute or two between a noise and a thorough rousing. We must leave Sally, listening, trembling, outside, and whisk ourselves, Midsummer Night fashion, into the inside scene.

"Bolt the door! — let out the cat! — run, hide!" cried Nell Southernwood, in a terrified whisper, to her com

panion, and ran herself on into their own room, and fastened herself in there.

They had their shoes in their hands. Cora flew down the five steps, bolted the door into the porch, flew up, opened a door upon the landing into a clothes-closet, jerked out poor pussy by the nape of her neck from her nap in the wash-basket, shut and bolted, with a practiced hand, the upper door, and whirled herself into Sally's room just in time.

A light appeared at the far end of the wing, coming from the housekeeper's bedroom. There were sounds of moving in other rooms.

Miss Ladd laid her hand upon the knob as she passed the Ackworth-Southernwood apartment.

"Young ladies, are you here?"

"Oh, yes'm! What is it?" came in answer, in Miss Southernwood's voice, and the housekeeper could hear her start up in bed. She stopped again at Sally's door.

"Miss Gibson!"

"Ma'am!" somebody said, with Sally's indescribable flattened Yankee length upon the vowel, but in a breathless sort of gasp, in which the voice was half lost.

Miss Ladd unbolted the door upon the landing. The cat rushed up, with glittering eyes, out of the darkness.

"A very careless piece of business altogether!" said Miss Ladd to herself and the cat. If pussy could have spoken, she might have assured the lady how very *careful* it had been, and how many times before she had been shut up in wise reserve.

Doors were "a crack ajar" all along the passages, and noses out, Cora's and Nell's no less than all the rest.

"Return to your beds, young ladies," said the housekeeper, in a general way, as she walked along. "There is nothing the matter. Only a carelessness of Hannah's,"

she added, over the balusters, to Miss Wilcroft's own inquiry from the front hall below.

"Return to your beds, young ladies," repeated Miss Wilcroft, "and remember the rules."

"It was an *awful* noise!" panted Nell. "We are frightened just to death."

The two confederates left each the other serenely to her own devices. As to Sally, "She'll climb up by the cherry-tree, of course," said Crack to herself. "She is n't a fool. And then — we shall *have* her!"

She looked to the window, found it open to the first catch of the spring, softly lifted it to the highest, and presently slid off to her own quarters. There she said, solemnly addressing an article of furniture, before which she sat down on the floor to take off her stockings, "*Bureau*, my dear, that was the very scapiest scrape you and I ever got into yet!"

It was a "rule" that the young ladies were not to converse with each other in their bedrooms after ten o'clock, and they reported themselves daily in regard to the keeping of these ordinary rules. An apostrophe to a bureau was not upon the consciences of some in these reports.

Sally listened, with her back to the door, and the pinch of salt held fast in her fingers. The noise ceased, and the hush of safety came. She had heard no footsteps, nor the drawing of the bolt. How should she, out there at the well, when the house inmates could not? She wondered if Crack and Nell had not watched her and then made some racket to frighten her into turning back again.

"And get caught, too!" she exclaimed within herself, indignantly. "Little *they'd* care!" All the more she kept on, now, to the apple-tree. She felt like the Princess Parizadc.

Over by the little park somebody else leaned quietly

against a tree, its trunk between him and the boarding-house building. Over his shoulder he watched the solitary little figure as it passed from the well on into the darkness of the orchard. "Sleep-walking?" he wondered. Or what *were* all these tangled mysteries of school-girl life?

John Archer had not felt satisfied when the two young ladies had left them, begging, *commanding*, not to be accompanied further than the park corner.

"The truth is," Cora said, when he objected, "it is Saturday night, and" —

That truth was patent. It was as far as she could go with the truth; the "and" stopped her. Nell finished, abruptly, —

"We are out of hours, and shall have to get in our own way. Now go, please. It's all right."

They had even spoken a little crossly. It had been but a stupid frolic, after all, to risk so much for. Fan had not been able to arrange everything. She had given Dick Southernwood a hint the night before that the moonlight walk might be; but he had been off all day with Ackworth and Oldridge and the Lewises; and it turned out that they had gone to Widefield, fishing, and got back, in the usual plight of fishermen, just as the party reached Judge Lewis's gates, on the first slopes of Round Top, where it had been confidently counted on that they would join. There had only been Fanny, themselves, slow John, and the quiet Olivers. The excitement had been the tracing of Mars and Saturn's places as they came up in the bright southeastern constellations. They were a little vehement in dismissing "slow, honest John."

But John had let his sister go on with the Olivers, and meant to see for himself that their "all right" *was* right, so far, at least, as their safety was concerned.

Not to annoy or compromise them, he let them go their

own way up the avenue on the east side, keeping all the park shrubbery between them and the house; but he followed, at a little distance, as far as the Seminary front. He saw them, in the faint light of the low, early-setting moon, flit off around the great gray building, instead of crossing the avenue direct, and so throwing their light dresses in relief against the dark fence and hedges, in view from the windows.

He saw them scud out from the orchard, and gain the cover of the well-curb; then, close under the shed, pass along to the little porchway; its black, shut door gave their white figures clearly as they went by; and then, upon a bulkhead, or something like, beyond, he saw them crouch, in a little cloudy heap, and wait motionless.

He looked at his watch in the moonlight, holding it carefully to catch a glinting ray direct upon it. The black hands upon the white face stood at half-past ten. All was dark in the Seminary boarding-house; the lights were always out at ten. The moon went out, now, at her hour, behind Round Top, and there was only the thin, tremulous starlight.

"Queer," the young man thought, settling himself in the corner of the deep, recessed entrance to the Seminary. "But I can stand it as long as they can."

He waited there the half hour, till the heavy bell near by sounded eleven. He saw the door open, showing the blacker shade of space within; he saw Sally step out and turn away; then the swift gliding in behind of the two stealthy figures, that he began to think wore all their white, like the whited sepulchres, on the outside; and then came the noise, the glancing light, and the dead stillness again,—with that one solitary girl-form, in its straight, dusky wrapper, standing by the well.

VII.


The Princess Parizade came back, having counted her hundred, and eaten her green apple. Looking neither to the right nor left, she walked to the door — and found it fast. Still thinking it a joke, she waited, listened, tried again. She thought they meant to terrify her — to try her spunk to the utmost; to make her speak, and break the charm, perhaps.

She scratched lightly, like a mouse, upon the panels. She would let them know she understood, and was not afraid. She listened, tried again. Dead stillness, and the door as solid as the wall.

Without turning, she slipped along to the house-corner, and into the angle under the cherry-tree. Above her was her own window, wide open. She knew she had not left it so.

She was sure now that the girls were teasing her. They were in her room, perhaps, and would look out presently. But, in the stillness, she could almost have heard a breath, — she drew a long and audible one herself, as a call, — and yet in five minutes more, that seemed half an hour, she caught no breath or rustle. She felt as if she had searched the space with ears like eyes, and found it empty.

Well — there was the cherry-tree. And was n't this an emergency? She had her hand upon one of the heavy green blind-slats of the wood-house, and grasped it firmly. It would have been as easy as going up-stairs. But the thought flashed clearly into her mind, — was it any more an innocent emergency than it would have been to have had to get *out* that way, or not try her Midsummer charm at all?



It was an emergency of her own making, for her own fun, in a daring exploit. Had she any more right to finish than to begin it by a breaking of her word?

Sally Gibson's spunk was getting too much for her. She had it in two sorts, it seemed, and the one was always running itself up against the other, and getting annihilated.

She went back to the doorstep, turned the latch once more, and then sat down to think. She came pretty near the truth. They had set her window wide open, that she might get in after she had been sufficiently frightened by the locking out; and they had gone to bed.

Knock, and alarm the house, she *could* not. Even if she had dared for herself, — almost Sunday morning as it was, — there was the locking out; and, mean as it had been, she would not get the others into the scrape. They did not know that she *could* not come in by the tree and the window.

John Archer had changed his post, crossing to the big linden at the head of the park. The brown figure rose slowly from the doorstep and walked directly towards him. He knew how to dodge round a tree-trunk, and he coolly kept it between her and himself till she reached the seminary building, and he saw her go up the two long, broad steps to the main door.

"Will she get in? And will she dare to stay there all night? And will it be fit to let her?" He thought all that while she tried the great latch and found it fastened. Then he stepped out, and said, in a calm, gentle voice, "I am John Archer. Can I help you?"

"Oh dear!" cried poor little Sally, starting wildly, and forgetting all about her St. John's Eve charm; if, indeed, that had not been the last thing in her thoughts for a quarter of an hour. "How came *you* here? Oh dear!"

"How came either of us here, oh dear?" said John Archer, a little bit contemptuously, notwithstanding his kindness. "And how came those other two to go in and shut you out?"

"Did they go in? Perhaps they thought they would come too, and got frightened."

"Come? What do you mean? They had *been*, I should think."

"Been? Don't tell me, if it's anything I don't know. I'd rather keep my own part to myself," said Sally, with all the real Grandmother Punchard alive in her now, and her wits about her.

"And won't you please go home?" It was the second time that night a young lady had told him to go home.

"Of course I will go home," he said, almost as if it had been Sally both times; "but I should like to see you safe first. What are you going to do?"

"I am not sure yet," said Sally, coolly, looking down at him from the top step, but covering up, none the less, a great anxiety with her coolness. "I *can* ring the bells," she mused.

"I think you had better," said John Archer.

"I won't if I can help it," said Sally to that, quite stoutly. "I don't think I deserve to get into an *awful* scrape, and that would be one. If the gallery door is n't locked, I can get in here;" and she turned round and tried it as she spoke. It opened from the end of the porched recess upon the foot of a narrow little flight of stairs. She stepped inside.

"I'm all right now," she said. "Please go. Good-night." She would have shut the door, but John Archer, although it was the third time of asking, made a long step to the threshold, and stood in such a way there that she could not do so without almost pushing it upon him.

"I don't like this," he said, as stoutly as she. "It's none of my business; but I'm here, and I feel responsible about leaving you so. I wish I knew at least enough to understand" —

John Archer had thought Sally Gibson a nice, simple girl; lively enough, but he had noticed that her liveliness stopped short of some things where that of the other girls sprang into fullest play. He did not like leaving her where she stood now, in more ways than one.

"You'd like to know what I was out in the orchard for? I'd rather tell you than not. I went to get a green apple, — and a Midsummer Night's dream. I guess I shall have it. Now go. And thank you."

She spoke with the brusqueness of fifteen, and of a girl whose habit it was to say exactly what she meant.

"Here's Fanny's shawl," he said, and thrust it in through the closing door. "She lent it to" — but the door shut. She would not hear whom it had been lent to.

Curled up in the corner of one of the great bowed windows, rolled in Fanny Archer's Rob Roy plaid, her head upon an old leather cushion from a platform chair, Sally Gibson dreamed out several things that midsummer night that had not been in her philosophy before.

After the first, she ceased to be afraid. There was companionship in the stir of the silver poplars softly rustled by the faint rising breeze. Now and then a bird nestled and chirped, and at first daylight, a flock of black-birds came fluttering and "chucking" among the boughs of the orchard.

If it had been the right sort of adventure that had brought her there, there would have been a good deal of exciting and sweet relish about it. She seemed to be abroad with the night, and to find out the story of it by being one of the happy, homeless things who need not

hide away from it, because the darkness and the sweet stillness are themselves their house.

At six o'clock she hung up Fanny's shawl in the cloak-room below, walked straightforwardly from the Seminary to the boarding-house, and let what would come of it. She scorned any skulking. If she had skulked, she would have been sooner suspected. A housemaid saw her, and thought she had been over to the school-rooms to fetch something. Nobody else met her.

Sunday rules were strict. Prayers, singing, Bible lessons, meals, church, writing of sermon notes, — these took up hour after hour.

Nobody guessed — unless it were John Archer, looking down from the choir gallery — the thoughts that lurked, and waited, and grew, that day, under three of the cottage-bonnets in the long Seminary pew. Sweet and maiden-like, all three, with their little round face-caps and wreaths; Cora's of pink daisies, and Nell's of blue forget-me-nots, and Sally's of small rosebuds.

In the half hour of liberty between tea and evening singing, Cora and Nell came arm in arm down the long hall to where Sally was standing in the doorway.

"Did you get your dream last night?" Cora asked her. All the deferrings of the day had given her no more time than she was glad of, before the asking of that question, which she was yet too anxious to let wait longer. There had been something a wee bit unapproachable and ominous in Sally Gibson's air. Yet Crack inquired of her with a jolly nonchalance.

"Yes, I did," said Sally.

"Oh, what was it?" cried Nell, excitedly. A little obtuse Nell was, and took things at the foot of the letter; apt, too, as such literal people are, to jump readily at the marvelous.

"I dreamt I saw my grandmother," said Sally, "and she said to me, 'You've got my best coat and mantle, of good, handsome stuff; but you're determined to put it on wrong side out; and you don't keep out of the dust and mud with it. If you want to settle about the next ten years, you'll have to settle first which way you're going to wear things.'"

"Was that all?" asked Nell.

"All there is to tell," said Sally, and walked away.

"Do you expect she really did dream that, Crack?"

"Probably," Crack answered, looking after Sally rather uneasily. "We told her she could dream pretty much what she was o' mind to; and I presume she was o' mind to dream that."

"Do you believe she's mad?"

"She's *something* when she spits like that. But she can't say anything, after all. She's done it herself, and now she can't hinder us. She's fair enough to see that."

On Monday noon, armed with the half-pound of gum-drops, the twain came to Sally's room.

Cora began, with an insinuating blandness, springing at once all fences, and landing herself in close intimacy and privilege.

"See here," she said. "We want a favor of you. We want you to 'lind us the loan of yer gridiron,' as the Irishman said. Nobody's got a gridiron but you. And you won't keep it all to yourself, will you, Spunkie?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Here's your bet," put in Nell, thinking it a good time to parenthesize with the gum-drops, and holding forth the parcel.

"I did n't bet," said Sally. "I don't want it. I don't know what you mean," she repeated to Cora.

"Well, I mean this: (Nell, you're a goose!) there's to

be a row on the river to-morrow evening, all the way up to Tomahawk, by moonlight. And Nell and I are asked. And we want you to let us out and in, — *your way*, you know.”

“You’re welcome to my way, if you like it. But you can take it for yourselves, without coming to me, I should think.”

“If you’ll leave your door unlocked,” said Cora, delighted. “And let your window be ’way up till we come back. We’ll all go next time. You’ve never been on the river, Sally. What a blessing that old cherry-tree is, now that one of us has got this room! Only it’s almost *too easy*.”

“Wait a minute. You’ve made a mistake. That is n’t my way, and it is n’t going to be yours.”

“You won’t let us through? Is that what you mean?” and Cora’s face changed swiftly as she turned from the window upon her.

“Yes. Exactly.”

“You’re high and mighty, I should think! Who came up that way at midnight, Saturday? And who’s going to be monitor now?”

“Nobody,” said Sally, quietly, letting the word stand for whichever answer it might. Cora chose, not really believing, to take it for the first, and pursued her point.

“How did you get into the house, then? We know you had to, for there was a scrimmage between the cat and a tin pail on the little stairway, and everybody was scared up, and the doors got locked. You could n’t have got in any other way, and I went and fixed the window for you. Much thanks I get!”

“I did n’t get in. I stayed out all night.”

“Oh my soul!” ejaculated Crack, and Nell Southernwood turned pale and choked, trying to speak.

"And after *that*, you'll undertake to dictate? That would be a pretty story to tell!"

"*Tell!*" said Sally, like a thunder-clap. "*You say tell!*"

"Well, yes," said Cora, doggedly. "I don't say *tattle*. But things come out if they are n't kept in. And you 'd find *you* 'd have to tell."

Sally looked right at her. Not a look on purpose for a look — of wrath or scorn. A look for the sake of seeing — what sort of animal this girl might be. Cora Ackworth felt the look and the seeing through and through her. Sally had been sitting. She got up now.

"*You* have n't made me find anything that I had to do or had not. Remember that, please. I found it all before;" and with that she walked out of the room.

"She's gone to tell!" gasped Nelly Southernwood. "Grandmother Punchard's waked up again!" The certainty flashed sharp across her dullness, like lightning across the night.

VIII.

Miss Wilcroft was always in the little study at this hour. She sat there now, some books and papers before her on her table at the window.

A knock came. She called, "Come!" and Sally Gibson entered. Miss Wilcroft laid down her pencil, looked up at her pupil, and waited for her to speak.

"I've come, ma'am, to tell you something. It is very bad, but I can't make it any better by a long story. I was out after hours Saturday night, and when I tried to get in the doors were locked. I had to stay out."

Anything like this, so calmly acknowledged, Miss Wilcroft had never encountered before in her whole experi-

ence. Her large, serious eyes widened with astonishment. The little pink bow under her chin thrilled.

"You stayed out?" she repeated, slowly.

"Yes, ma'am. I had no way to get in — except the window. I thought of that, but I concluded that it was n't a real emergency — that I could n't have helped — and I had n't any right."

"What were you out for? Where did you go?" Miss Wilcroft rarely asked two questions at once, but ten would not have met the points of her perplexity.

"It was nonsense. Something I had heard about Midsummer Eve, and a charm, and a dream. I thought I'd try it, because it was a little scaring. I went as far as the orchard."

"How did you get out?"

"I opened the doors."

"And they were locked when you came back?"

"Yes, ma'am. There was a noise in the house. I believe the cat had upset something. And I suppose somebody found the doors unlocked, and fastened them."

"Sit down. I must understand this. The *noise* happened at near midnight. Were you out *then*?"

"Yes, ma'am. I went out after it struck eleven. That was the time for it."

"And this was pure fun? Of your own? There was no one else — nothing else — concerned?"

"I was all alone. It was all my own concern."

"No one with you at any moment? You spoke with no one before or after?"

"Accidentally, — yes, ma'am." Sally said it slowly, reluctantly.

"With whom, if you please?"

"Mr. John Archer." The words fell into a silence that felt tremendous.

"Explain, Miss Gibson!" Miss Wilcroft's tone was really shocked and awful now.

"I cannot explain. He appeared to be going through the grounds, — and he stopped — when he saw me — and thought I was locked out — and asked if he could help me any way."

"And you?"

"I thanked him, and asked him to go home; and I went up into the Seminary gallery, and stayed there."

"Is this all that happened, and all you know?"

"It is all that happened to me, and it is all I know that happened at all."

"I suppose you see," said Miss Wilcroft after a pause, — and her voice had a tone of real trouble, — "that this is a most serious thing? So serious" —

Sally was struck with a terror she had not felt before.

"You won't send me away, Miss Wilcroft?"

"I do not know what to do with you, Sally," Miss Wilcroft said; and the monosyllables fell separately and heavy from her lips. "You are not a bad girl, yourself; you have some noble traits; there are noble traits even in this wrong business, and your confession of it; but you demoralize my school. You are dangerous."

"I do not mean to be any more," said Sally, stoutly meek. "I have been wrong side out. Now I am going to turn, — whatever you do to me."

"You must go to your own room, and remain there. This thing is not ended. No one is to come to you, and you are to speak to no one, until I send for you."

Sally took her sentence and left the room. She met four or five girls on the way, — neither Cora nor Nell were among them, — but she passed on without a word, reached her room, and locked herself in. In the midst of her trouble she was proud to be trusted so far.

Nobody saw her again, either that day or the next. All else seemed to be going on as usual. But there was a terrible vague rumor afloat that Spunkie had done something beyond forgiveness. It was evident that she was in deep disgrace, and that some mysterious event was impending.

Miss Wilcroft sent for the housekeeper to come to her in her study. She told the story to her. "It is all the child knows, evidently," she said.

"But there is more which *we* ought to know. The question is, *Who locked those doors?*"

It was all over with the rowing-party for Nell and Cora. Yet they were in relieved, self-gratulatory spirits; almost as if the thing they had planned to do were an involuntary danger that had been lifted from them. They felt so innocent in that which they had been interrupted in. *They* had not stayed out all night.

In all this overhanging mystery and threatening, no questions had been asked of them. They were bright enough to know the point wherein their imminent peril lay; but that did not seem to have been inquired into. Sally had evidently made but the simplest possible confession of herself, out of pure grit, that would not take or remain under a menace. That she should have seen John Archer, or had anything to answer to what so nearly touched their own little safe affair, they never dreamed.

There were other things they never dreamed of.

Hannah, the housemaid, who had been reproved for her negligence, came to Miss Ladd on the Monday afternoon, with a scrap of blue figured lawn in her thumb and finger.

"If the cat tipped over that pail, mum, the cat had on a musling gown'd the living likeness of Miss Ackworth's. I found this sticking in the ear of it."

"The cat!"

"The pail, mum," explained Hannah. "And I would n't meddle in the matter out of any spite ; but if there's to be a hanging, I think there'd better be a ketching of all the killprits first. And since it's begunned upon, I must say it's borne in upon *me* that it ain't the first time ; and if things continyers, we'll all be in tin pails, or worse scrapes, when we're slumbering like babes in our beds."

Miss Ladd took the bit of torn muslin, with its peculiar pretty little dropping blue-bell on it, to Miss Wilcroft's room.

That lady had just sent this note, of stately old fashion, to John Archer :

"Miss Wilcroft presents compliments to Mr. John Archer, and would like to see him on a matter of importance. She will esteem it a particular favor if Mr. Archer will call upon her at the cottage this afternoon."

Mr. John Archer called. Mr. John Archer behaved like a gentleman, — a gentleman in a dilemma. He explained his presence in the Seminary grounds on Saturday night ; but frankly declared that he would rather not be pressed for the names of the two young ladies who had been of the party that evening, since it seemed to have been without permission.

Miss Wilcroft was glad to assure him, politely, in her turn, that it would be needless for her to insist, as quite other testimony already pointed to the fact which it was necessary to elucidate.

Mr. Archer avoided, dexterously, the details of hour and incident that would most aggravate the matter ; but was obliged to own that he had delayed "awhile" in anxiety to be certain if his charge entered the house in safety, and that they had apparently taken advantage of the "unexpected" opening of the door to do so.

He clearly established Sally Gibson's story of herself ;

and it was pretty evident, through all his chivalry for the delinquents, that his sentiment in regard to their conduct or fate went no further than a manly unwillingness to precipitate the revelation or its ill consequence upon them; while for Miss Sally there was an irrepressible tone of championship in what he believed to have been some sly ill usage of her; and his appreciation of her spirit and straightforwardness he took no trouble to conceal.

"I don't pretend to know the right and wrong of it," he said; "and I would rather not answer questions if I did; but if my sister made a mistake, I hope she would walk out of it with as much pluck and dignity as Miss Sally did out of hers, — that's all."

A ball of yarn may be big — ever so big — have hundreds of yards in it — and be tightly wound together; but it is unrolled very easily when once the end is found. A good many little twists that had puzzled excellent Miss Wilcroft and her assistants came out and showed a clear, continued thread in this winding up that they had got hold of.

Miss Wilcroft quietly gathered all into her own hands as it came forth, — stopped all gossip and spread, — said her word of authority or influence here and there.

The only thing that appeared was that Sally Gibson was in punishment, and that something had been thoroughly inquired into and as thoroughly hushed up. This was not a novelty in Miss Wilcroft's serenely autocratic administration.

Nobody knew, except Miss Ladd and herself, that these two made an official visit to Number 5 in the wing, just after the lights were out, at ten on Tuesday evening. Nobody knew, of course, then, how long that visit was, nor how much was accomplished.

Everybody knew next morning at dressing-time, that

the Eastern stage had come, with an awful lumbering, up to the front door at half-past five, and that baggage had been taken down-stairs; but only two bedroom windows opened to the front, and the great coach was driven close to the piazza, and nobody could see what miserable passenger got in with her disgrace. Yet everybody thought she knew, and everybody was dismayed.

There was a ring at the door-bell just before the great house-bell sounded its second summons at seven o'clock. It was hardly noticed, in the excitement already reigning, although a gentleman's voice was heard in the hall, and the reception-room door was opened and closed, and then immediately the front door was shut again, and two persons, though nobody looked out to see that, walked quickly away together down the drive to the foot of the park, where a light carriage waited. It was scarcely a pleasant drive that Harry Ackworth and his sister took that morning, to meet the Birksfield stage at Longbridge.

There was a breathless hush as one after another came down into the long room for prayers. All but three or four — Nell and Cora were always among the last — were seated, when Miss Wilcroft entered, followed gravely and subduedly by Sally Gibson!

The lady principal directed the young girl to take her usual seat, walked to her own at the head of the room, turned and paused, standing there till every eye was fixed upon her.

"I have a very few words to say to you all before our morning service. The young lady who came in with me is now, I am happy to tell you, in entire understanding with myself. There will be no explanation of the *mistake* in consequence of which she has been, not without fault on her own part, separated from you for these last two days. She will take her place among you now, I think, on a higher footing than ever before.

"It is only through some faults and mistakes that most of us rise to our best and final character. I wish you to feel that she is in no disgrace. Beyond that, there is no need to explain, and I would request that there be no inquiry or discussion. Two others of your number have left you altogether this morning. It has been thought best that Miss Cora Ackworth and Miss Ellen Southernwood should return to their homes."

The color burned higher and higher in Sally Gibson's face, which she tried hard to keep steadfast; the lips quivered a little, and she was glad when the reading of the Scripture gave her time to calm herself, and yet more when she could kneel down in prayer and hide both head and heart away, as if she laid her face in the lap of her mother.

Louise Summerway was the first to come and speak after breakfast, in her gentle way, with Sally. She did it as nobody else could have done it, — without seeming as if it were in the least a particular thing to do. She asked some question, I believe, about the Virgil lesson, which only came on Wednesdays and Saturdays; and then they walked over to the Seminary together.

From that time a friendship began that lasted through the three years that they remained at Oakhaven school, where the saying was that Louise Summerway and Sally Gibson went together like mouse-color and scarlet; one just set off the other.

"Only," Sally used to say, "you must have a good deal of the mouse-color, and just touch it up a little here and there with the scarlet." And *Madam* Sally says to-day that "spunk was n't meant to keep a steady light with; you must have a quiet little candle-flame for that."

I said at the beginning that this all happened nearly fifty years ago. But I know it is all true, almost even to

the very words ; for I have heard it, in the separate bits, ever so many times, from one and another of them, to whom it has been all their lives a very particular beginning and remembrance.

I am Louise Summerway's youngest daughter ; and my mother and I have made long, lovely visits many a time together, at the old Three Hill Farm in Rexford, where Sally's children and grandchildren, friends and friends' children, gather by the houseful in the summer holidays.

Dr. John Archer — splendid old gentleman that he is — tells the Midsummer Eve part, "*pars magna*" of which he says he was. "Of course," puts in Madam Sally, "since it was the Eve of Saint John !" She pretends it for fun, but she means it just as honestly as she means everything.

Madam Sally herself, being coaxed by us youngers, has told us the pranky parts ; and my mother has filled up with what "Spunkie" would never think of telling ; for, from "making traditions" for the wild ones, Sally Gibson ended, you see, by making a real, splendid tradition of high character, that was told for a memorial of her in the school, and was an influence in it for truth and courage and generosity, for ever after.

And dear, beautiful Miss Wilcroft, who lived to beyond eighty in a world of love and friendship that she made for herself in hearts and homes of women who had been girls with her at Oakhaven, — Miss Wilcroft rounded out the whole with what her own oversight and understanding discerned of it at the time, and watched to its fulfillment after.

There was a great deal fulfilled, indeed, that it would take a very big book to tell of, from the working of the spell which Sally tried so unsuspectingly that twenty-

third of June. If it did not unfold all at once the history of a coming decade, it began the chronicle and settled the relations of half a century for certain human lives.

Doctor John Archer came to Rexford when he had got his diploma, and took an opening practice there. He is the beloved physician of twenty miles of country round ; and — did n't I say that Madam Sally is Doctor John Archer's wife ? Of course she is ; and has been for forty years. Forty years of a Midsummer Night's Dream, I believe, if long, sunshiny, happy days, and brief, calm, comforted nights, and warmth and sweetness, and everything bright and full and generous and strong, can make up a midsummer dream or reality.

HOW BEL CAUGHT THE "BURGLAR."

It was a favorite story ; but these girls had never heard it. It was the very hour and mood, also, for the story.

There had been company — young company and a carpet dance — and it was twelve o'clock before Bel and her three staying visitors — Esther, and Jeannie, and Fly (Fly's name was Phyllis, but they called her Fly, it was so like her) — were all in Bel's bedroom, from which doors opened each way into her own special young-guest chambers, and, too excited to sleep, were all eager for a last bit of fun or wonder.

"It makes me think," said Bel, "of my Spanish aunt, — my name-aunt, — Isabelita, who came here — to New York, I mean — to school, and then married Uncle Rod. She caught a burglar once ; and it was right after a party, like this, when she and three other girls were together, talking and laughing, exactly as we are."

Fly slid down close to Bel's side on the sofa, from the arm of it where she had been perching ; Esther drew her hassock nearer, along the rug, and Jeannie gave a quick look at the Indian screen which stood across the open door into the hall, as she turned round, brush in hand, from the dressing-table. "Oh, tell us !" they all cried ; and the concerted syllables rung girlish-clear, and were heard in the "boys' room," where Geoff and his crony Jack were as much up and awake as Bel and her friends.

"There goes the immortal burglar story again !" said Geoff to Jack. "It's Bel's one sensational, and she keeps

it wound up like a peg-top, ready for a spin at a chance. She turns up her nose awfully at a dime novel ; but I 'd like as many dimes as times she 's got off that yarn, anyhow. Never heard it ? That 's a wonder. Come along, then. All fair ; take care of yourself, though, when she comes to the wind-up ; for as soon as they get through with the shudders, they 'll be peeping round all the corners after the forty thieves."

Whereupon the two youths betook themselves noiselessly into the wide, matted hall, established themselves on a bamboo settee, and infamously listened.

"They were brushing their hair," said Bel, "and talking over the party. And they got into a great gale about something one of them was telling ; and Aunt Lita laughed and laughed, till she cried. And she was holding her hands on her sides, and saying, 'Oh, don't!' and then screaming with laughter again, at the mimicking that was going on with the story, when *all of a sudden, girls*, in the very *middle* of a spasm, she happened to look across the room. And *under the bed* — just under the edge of the valance," — Bel spoke most slowly and impressively, — "she saw, as plain as day, the *heel of a man's boot* !"

There was the sound of a sighing and a soft rustling together in the girls' room ; out on the bamboo couch, the two boys were flinging *their* heels up in carefully hushed convulsions, and holding their doubled fists across their mouths.

"What *did* she do ?" Fly buzzed, tremblingly, into Bel's ear.

"She just kept on laughing," said Bel, with a proud calmness. "She laughed, and laughed, and laughed ; and *watched the boot all the time*. Presently she saw it move. Just a hair's breadth ; but it *did* move. Then she laughed harder. The other girls were half frightened at her, not knowing anything else to be frightened at.

HOW BEL CAUGHT THE "BURGLAR." 303

" 'Don't, Lita!' they said. 'You'll raise the neighborhood.'

" 'I don't care ; I mean to,' said Aunt Lita. 'I mean Sue to hear us over the way.' And she went to the window and threw it up, and stood there in her white nightgown, in the bright gaslight, and laughed with all her might.

"She laughed till a policeman came and stopped opposite the window, and looked up at her. Then she beckoned to him with both hands, and before the others knew what she was about, she flew off through a little open dressing-room — like that — and down-stairs, and let him in at the front door ; and she got him up-stairs just in time to catch the fellow, who began to be scared, crawling out from under the bed, and the other girls all going into fits."

"That's the cue, Jack!" whispered Geoff. "'Going into fits.'"

And the two just waited for the gasping voices to begin with their horrified and wondering, but half-stifled exclamations, to steal off as they had come, stocking-footed and noiseless.


"I will say," Geoff remarked, when they were safe in the end bedroom again, and continuing their preparations for the night, "that she does n't tell it word for word alike any two times. She just lives it out again, fresh, every telling."

"I believe," said Jack, "she'd do just the same thing herself. She's exactly the girl to."

"Not much," said Geoff, cavalierly. "I know her lots better. She's my sister!"

"Bel," Esther was saying, leaning close, with her arms across Bel's lap, "what would *you* do, if you found — a burglar — hid in your room?"

"I'd — *hide* him! Or get somebody else to, as Aunt



Lita did," said Bel, who could n't resist a pun when it flew right in her face.

"Really and truly, though," she proceeded, "I'd *catch* him; and I've thought over half a dozen different ways."

"You'd forget them all if you saw the heel of his boot," said Fly. "I should."

"I don't mean to," said Bel. "I've made up my whole mind to catch that burglar whenever he comes."

"How do you know?" — began Esther, in a breathless kind of way, glancing round from corner to corner, and from piece to piece of the pretty furniture, and most lingeringly at the screens and hangings, — "how do you know there is n't — this minute" —

"I've a way of looking," interrupted Bel, serenely; "and I've looked. That's part of the plan."

Jeannie slid softly across the room to the door behind the screen, pushed it to, and bolted it.

"I was sure I heard something move in the hall, a minute or two ago," she said.

"And you've left it to go into those innocent boys' room?" demanded Bel, indignantly; and she walked to the door, flung it open, and stood listening.

Those innocent boys were breathing deep, peaceful breaths of sleep, and there was only the faint sound of these, and no stir else in the wide house.

Bel turned back, satisfied. "There's nothing at all," she said to Jeannie. "It was nerves, that's all. I've had 'em. They're preliminary exercises. I've got pretty nearly through with *them*."

"I would n't talk so for all the world," said Fly. "It's taking fate upon yourself. You'll *have* to catch a burglar some time; see if you don't."

"And see if I *don't*, then!" retorted Bel. "I do feel as if I were being led up to it," she declared, with a grand simplicity.

Fly entreated to stay here, with her, to sleep. "I can never go alone into my room," she said,

So they fastened the door into the little rose chamber ; and Esther and Jeannie left theirs very wide open into the double blue room.

Three days afterwards there was an afternoon party at the Eager Place. A row on Opal Pond, gathering water-lilies,—tea on the terrace when they returned,—illuminated croquet in the evening.

The boys came to tea and croquet, but there had been a boy-engagement off somewhere else in the afternoon. It was eleven o'clock when Mr. Derby's carriage took all his young people — Bel and her friends, and the two boys — home ; and again there was the chatty undressing, and last best fun of going over the whole together in Bel's room.

The boys had been pointedly quiet during the return drive ; to be sure they had to sit outside ; and they said good-night in the upper hall with solemnity, when they had carried up the girls' candles and wraps. Geoffrey always wondered "what girls wanted to talk a thing to death for, over again, after they had had all the life out of it while it was going."

Bel was as nice as any little old maid. Fly just flirted off her fineries anyhow. Jeannie and Esther laid theirs in tolerable care and order, but they got no further than chairs and sofas for over-night disposing. Bel stood at least five minutes, with her pretty basque and overskirt upon her arm, waiting for Fly to finish a ridiculous story, that was, as she meant them to know, half fact, and half quick-witted, droll, impromptu fib.

"But listen !" Fly cried, as, in a breath's pause, Bel made a restless movement to the door. "*That* was merely 'to go back ;' now I've 'to go forward ;' 'to

conclude' and 'to recapitulate' don't come for ever so long!"

"Then, really," said Bel, "you must let me hang these up in the big closet first, and get on my dressing-gown. I can't be comfortable" —

"To lay a thing down a minute!" said Fly, whose loosened robings were fallen in a bright, gauzy heap about her, and whose lap was full of lilies from her hair, tumbled together with bracelets, earrings, fan and fan chain, gloves and every little removable that she had divested herself of while she told her story.

"You live the life of a perfect — catamount — with yourself; — always pouncing down upon every little accidental comfort and choking it, by way of taking it afterwards 'in peace!' You only get it in *pieces*!"

"She's 'Bel and the Dragon,'" said Esther, not really knowing whether that was Hebrew or Saxon apocrypha, or what either Bel or Dragon were or did.

"If the Dragon got the best of it, she is," said Fly. "But I don't suppose any of you know."

"I know what Bel's *Bub* did," whispered Bel, mischievously, dancing softly back and leaning down an instant over Fly's low seat. "He lorded it over the Flies!"

Now Geoffrey Derby had quite monopolized little Phyllis with his sixteen-year-old devotions; and Fly, on her part, had no voice in any play or plan that did not second Geoff's imperial suggestions; so she colored red under the white lilies that she tossed up over her head at Bel, and that fell back upon her own fair tangles of hair, and hung in them about face and neck. And in the minute that she had no other answer ready, Bel danced off again, and was in the hall and at the door of the "Big Closet."

The Big Closet was quite at the far end of the hall, too — that is, the door of it was. The closet itself ran along to

a dark depth; a great roomy "press," where nothing *was* pressed, but where all the nice, light, flounced things hung unrumpled; and Bel never failed to put her delicate dresses carefully away there the moment she had taken them off.

The gaslight, half turned down, was midway of the hall; the Big Closet door opened outward and *from* the light, so that this shone in towards the left, and gave Bel glimpse enough to find any empty peg, and to see that she did not leave one thing "mussing" another.

If possible burglars were ever out of her thought, I should say that for that moment she did forget them, as she threw back the door and was stepping in with her pretty muslins on her arm. Their fun had not been in the burglar vein to-night; all was cheery and everyday — if that be the word for the mood and chatter of an hour when it was nearly next day, to be sure, but next day had yet to struggle to its being through the midnight.

She was taken as unaware as her "whole made up mind" could ever be. She was going straight in, aiming for a peg on the far side, when the light, falling in over her shoulder, struck upon something from which it came back to her startled eyes with a strange kind of blow, that she almost recognized as if she had felt it before, — that now it came, at least, she knew for the very shock she had expected! It was as if one had dreamed often of being struck by lightning; and then, some terrible instant, the flash should come, and in the very enveloping of it, the thought — quick as itself — should flash, too, "This is it! The very awful thing that I have dreamed!"

From behind and between the ruffles and folds of her mother's beautiful crimson silk dress and a heavy black one, which hung side by side, projected a coarse gray trouser-knee, and below stood two big feet.

No boots, — heels or tips ; something more fearfully significant of stealth and purpose ; *stockings*, with villainous-looking, stumpy ankles, and bulgy insteps and clumsy, conspicuous, dingy-white toes !

She felt as if there were lead in her own feet ; as if she could never move or get away.

Scream ? Of course not ! Fixed in her mind was one principle : to keep on — if she saw a piece of hidden burglar — doing just what she had been doing before. But all she was about doing now was to hang up these muslin things ; she must do that, and then she must just turn round quietly and walk away. Not run, although she felt those two feet after her the minute she turned her back. She thought she had been staring at them a quarter of an hour, and that she had plainly been seen staring. Still, she did turn and walk out of the closet. She shut the door gently. There was a lock, but the key was gone. There was a thin, flat button, rather high up ; she reached and turned it, noiselessly, in the instant of her closing of the door. She went back to her own room where the girls were, stepped into her own closet, and put on her flannel wrapper. She felt pale and would not let them see her face. She took a little porcelain candlestick from the *étagère* near the door, went out to the hall gaslight, and lit the candle there.

“What in the world are you doing, Bel ?” came from Fly, inside.

“Going down for a glass of water. You ’ve made me so thirsty, laughing. Want some ?”

“Yes. Are n’t you afraid ? I ’ll come, too.”

“No ; don’t. We might wake mamma. I ’ll bring it. Would you like some cake, or an orange, or anything ?”

Her thought, all the time, was going ahead of her, through the whole, long, shut-up house.

Geoffrey and Jack? No; not those innocent boys. They would n't believe, to begin with; and to end with, they'd get shot, maybe.

Papa? But mamma, with her neuralgia and her poor nights, would be waked and frightened; and papa would just rush up, barefooted and barehanded. *He* never kept pistols and things; and he would n't stop to think.

Uncle Prescott — if he were only in his room. She must go and see.

Down the long stairway, through the hall; past mamma's door, with her hand round the light; that eerie feeling, all the way of soundless following, and of ambushes everywhere. Then there was the veranda door to open, and perhaps let a whole troop of them in. She must look out there, and go very softly!

She went into the dining-room and set down her light; came and peered behind the fluted muslin screen of the sashed door, and could just see by the starlight that the veranda was clear, and no motion or strange shadow on the grass slope beyond. At the other end of the veranda, in the wing, a door opened upon young Dr. Prescott Derby's office, and the stairway to his room above. There was the usual speaking-tube from doorside to bedside.

"Uncle Prescott! Uncle Prescott!"

The low, hoarse call would have hardly roused anybody but a doctor, used to "sleeping on the edge of his ear;" but Uncle Prescott heard it dreamily, and at the third call was wide awake. His "Hallo!" came down the tube; then Bel called:

"It's Bel. Come quick. There's somebody in the house."

"Bel's burglar!" half laughed Uncle Prescott to himself. But he was up in a second; put feet and arms with simultaneous movement into slippers and dressing-gown,

took something from the table at his bed-head, came quickly down to Bel, and followed her, as she turned without a word and sped quickly and noiselessly back all the way that she had come. Arrived in the upper hall, Bel pointed to the big closet door.

Dr. Derby opened it, and Bel pointed to the feet.

Dr. Derby pointed his pistol. "My friend," he said in a low, quiet voice, "show me an empty pair of hands, and come forward, or I fire."

Still nothing showed but the feet, and the gray knee, that never stirred.

Then Dr. Derby said, "If you move hand or foot, you are a dead man;" and, with his leveled revolver, walked into the closet.

There was a fearful explosion.

It was of laughter, — overcharged and dangerously rammed down, — and it came from the room of those innocent boys.

And — "Oh, what is it? What is it?" sounded from Bel's doorway, where three frightened faces peered round the screen.

Bel ran in and caught them, all in a huddle, by arms and shoulders, pushed them before her into the room again, and half sobbed, half chuckled out, in a queer, hysterical fashion:

"It's my Burglar! and it's those wretched, unprincipled boys!" and with that she just broke down and cried.

Dr. Derby and his pistol meanwhile presented themselves at the door of Geoff's apartment.

"I've half a mind to shoot you!" he said. "If I'd a cane here, instead!" —

"Are you all right, Bel dear?" he inquired, a moment after, leaving the boys in a hush of mingled and sup-

pressed jubilation and consternation, and pausing between Bel's door and screen.

Now Dr. Derby had scarcely ever been known to say 'dear' to any one before.

Bel came round to him instantly.

"Oh, you're so good!" she cried, still with a nervous catch in her voice, and with wide, wet, shining, excited eyes. "And I'm so sorry to have disturbed you!"

"You're a heroine," said Dr. Derby. "Now be brave enough to calm down and go to sleep." And he stooped and gently kissed her.

"To think if you had fired at a dummy, and riddled mamma's red silk!" said Geoffrey at the breakfast-table next morning, when all was well over, and everybody had slept upon it.

"And to think that Bel has n't caught her burglar yet, after all!" said Fly, sympathizing meanly in her heart with Geoff's side of the joke.

"I think she has, and valiantly," remarked Mr. Derby.

"Walked up to a Quaker gun!" said Geoff, growing bold enough for satire, now that nobody was shot.

"Walking up to a Quaker gun has taken the position before now, young man," said Uncle Prescott.

"And I've heard of a certain Christian," said Mr. Derby, "who was as brave as if the lion had not been chained."

"Well, she *was* brave — till she cried," acknowledged remorseless Geoff.

"If she had not cried, I might have been wanted for something apart from shooting," the doctor said, quite gravely. "Do you know what you put her nerves through?" And he looked sternly into Geoffrey's face.

"Never mind, Uncle Pres'!" said Bel, her heart

warming with the defense of her, so that her temper kept perfectly cool. "I've found out I *could*, if it had been real. And that was the thing I wanted to know. I don't care for the glory. I think I'm indebted to you, Geoffrey."

Bel had decidedly the best of it. And everybody said so, one way or another, except Fly.

Mamma had her kissing of her all to herself, when she got her for a minute in her own room after breakfast. And she said, softly :

"If my darling 'makes up her whole mind' about catching *everything* that has no business upon her premises as she did about the burglar, I shall have no fear for the peace and the beauty of her house."

TRYING ON BONNETS.

MISS AXIE sat at the little parlor window that looked out into the front yard. She was delicately darning a fine cotton stocking over a stone apple. Every morning, after she had watered her plants, she sat there and darned one pair, or more, if Maggie were slow; and Maggie usually was either slow, or so negligent that it was worse. Good old-fashioned Winifred took out the breakfast things. She would not let her mistress wash the cups except on Mondays. Mrs. Keene, Miss Axie's mother, sat by the low wood fire, and knit upon a long stripe of a resplendent afghan. She liked the touch of the soft wool, as it slipped off the large needles; and the clear, brilliant colors were easy to her fading vision, and it was restful work after a long life busied with many wearing things. She always had something of the sort to do, and sat placidly in her arm-chair, the bright hues heaped about her upon basket and light-stand, like sunset clouds about her hour of calm. Above, the windows were wide open, taking in the softening air of early spring; and Maggie stood among blankets and bolsters, and all the disarray of things that once in every twenty-four hours must be laid in fair and perfect order, to the express end of being put into a tumble again.

Miss Axie liked this half-hour in the morning. She thought it was the stocking, and the filling up a nick of time with economy and usefulness; but I think it was as much the window and the broad, down-hill street that led to the village, just in the edge of which they lived; and

Mrs. Mackie's pretty children going up to school; and young Howell hastening by to catch the train to town, — so grand he looked in the fair nobility of his fresh manhood, whereon a holy chrism had been laid by the awful hand of war; and the dreams she dreamt about them all, — dreams that grew out of knowledge, for had not her life for forty years, here in Riverly, among their fathers and mothers, included theirs?

Achsah Keene had not had a bright life of her own. She had been the eldest of five children, well educated and comfortably brought up; that is, they had always been to good schools, and had proper gowns and coats to wear, and they belonged to "nice people," and all their ideas were well-bred and delicate. But around their life was a line drawn, — a line of limit that pressed always just where these very ideas longed most to expand themselves; and, next to father and mother, the eldest had felt it most. Who knows where it had stopped her, beside where she was conscious? At any rate, the things that had come to her had been, many times, what she could not care to take; and those she would have reached for in gladness had stayed themselves beyond her grasp. So she was only an old maid now, living with her mother; sisters and brothers married and settled, or gone forth into the wide world; the father only a thought and a memory, now, in the earthly home, for fifteen years.

Everybody said it was bright and pleasant here, where the two ladies, with their birds and flowers, their fancy work, and their charity work, and their books, and their serving-women, so different from the drift and float that pervaded neighboring households, — old Winifred, who would as soon think of moving, and no sooner, than the hearth-stone itself; and young Maggie, who, with all her heedlessness and exasperations, was loyal at heart, and

had nowhere else on earth to go, — where these two dwelt so, in a safe, simple plenty, and in their heart-comfort together.

Yet with Miss Axie it was, after all, a great deal — out of window.

Miss Axie was a little sharp now and then. Life had demanded a good deal of her; and she, on her part, sometimes turned round and demanded a good deal of other human nature, that was but human, notwithstanding.

“Maggie is idling, as usual. I’ve not heard the broom yet. It is really marvelous what that girl does manage to do with her mornings!” Miss Axie dropped the stone apple from the last stocking, — rolled them neatly, the two pairs, — and laid them back, with scissors, cotton ball, thimble, and apple, in her basket. Then she took down into her lap a little writing-desk, and penciled a note.

“This ought to go at once,” she said. “Mrs. Ircutt will be longing for the second volume; and it is such a mean selfishness to let a club-book lie till the last minute, out of mere laziness, when one has finished it one’s self. I’ll send Maggie right up with it, whether or no!” Poor Maggie! “Whether or no!”

Miss Axie came up-stairs. Her foot fell lightly, always; and Maggie was absorbed. The chamber-door opened, like a flash of fate, upon her. And then there was a tableau.

Miss Axie stood with the door-knob in her hand. Along the sofa and upon the arm-chair were flung blankets and pillows; the sheets were thrown across the sill of the garden window; on the floor lay, still, the shreds of yesterday; and inside the little dressing-room stood her bath, just emptied, but the pail not carried away. A closet door, half opened also, showed within an uncovered band-box on the floor.

Miss Axie's new spring bonnet was on Maggie's head. Shoes down at heel, — Maggie would tread them so in three days' time, — a brown calico gown that had seen a week or more of morning service, and had got a rent within an hour from the ear of a water-pail, — bare, red arms, a broad face, and a chunky neck, purple now with a helpless shame, fright and consternation in her eyes, turned in a magnetic transfixment toward Miss Axie's own, a mouth set in a miserable grin, — for Maggie always grinned when she did n't know what else to do, — and surmounting all, above the rough brown hair, the offense and retribution of the bonnet!

Miss Axie was angry, and no wonder. She was too angry, for a moment, to exclaim. She looked straight into those petrified eyes without any mercy; and the purple turned to white about the lips, and the grin grew almost ghastly.

"I hope you think it is becoming," Miss Axie said quite quietly. "Look again," for the girl stood fronting her large dressing-glass. Then Maggie's foot began to scrape the carpet, awkwardly, to and fro, and her eyes fell, and the lips trembled down out of their rigidity, and there was only the shame left in the face.

But Miss Axie made up her mind in the moment what to do.

"I want these," she said, holding out the book and note, "carried up to Mrs. Ireutt's. You may go now, *just as you are.*"

"Oh, Miss Axie!" cried the girl, driven to speech in her distress. And her hands went up, involuntarily, to remove the bonnet, and fell again, not daring the profane touch before Miss Axie's eyes.

"Just as you are," repeated her mistress.

Tears rushed up to Maggie's face, and convulsed it;

but she could n't give way, and let them fall. Cry, all over Miss Axie's new bonnet-strings, and rub her cheeks grimy under the lace and flowers! She recollected in time, and put them back in a grotesque agony. She was not the first, nor the last. Many a weeping has been judiciously suspended because the pocket-handkerchief has been forgotten or laid astray. Then Miss Axie put the book and note down upon the dressing-table, and turned and left the room.

"A-ah, what am I to do then?" moaned the culprit to herself. "She's the one that'll let nothin' off when she has said it. An' the work waitin', an' all! An' am I to go by the street, an' all the people lookin'? An' if I go by the back—there's Winny! An' who'll be comin' to the door, I wonder!" It never entered her simple head to refuse her punishment, defy her mistress, and throw up her place. The drift and the float can do that, but there was a moral force upon Maggie. She had seen hard lines from ten years old to fifteen. She had been here since then, and she knew nowhere else to go.

She went and listened at the back stairs. She heard Winny go into the breakfast-parlor with the tray of washed-up dishes. Now, then, it must be, since there was no help for it. She flew, desperately, down the stairway, and through the kitchen, out into the garden, and along the walk, till she got behind the currant hedge. Then there was a wall to climb, and a field to cross, and another wall, and then to go up through Mrs. Ircutt's garden. Sorely tempted she was to pull off the bonnet, leave it somewhere under the shrubbery, and run on bare-headed. But the dog might get it. Besides, there were the overlooking windows.

If only John Mullen might be anywhere but in the garden. But *he* would n't have wanted her to face the street,

and he 'd be pitiful. Only it was almost a prayer in the poor foolish child's heart that he might have been sent off ten miles, rather.

Miss Axie had thought of the back way in the midst of her resentment; else, perhaps, she would hardly have given such a sentence. But she never thought of John Mullen. She could not know — when can we ever? — all the force of what she did.

But John Mullen was there, turning over the muck behind the lower barn, as Maggie came crouching, fearfully, round the corner of the hedge. She would have run back; but he had seen her, and dropped his fork. She stood much as she had stood under Miss Axie's terrible eye, only without the grin. When he came close, and stopped before her, she had to battle with the tears again.

"Arrah, Maggie! is it you?" cried out the honest fellow, and uttered never a word about her wonderful array, seeing her trouble, and guessing something of it in the midst of his amaze.

"I'm a big fool, jist, — lavin' my work for anny nonsense; an' I'm jist come up with, — that's the truth of it," said Maggie, with a sudden noble bravery, trusting it all to him. Hers was a poor and homely love, maybe; but it was of the kind that casts out fear.

"She told me to go as I was; an' troth, I was this way!" At that, the absurdity came over them, and they both laughed outright. Then Maggie's trouble was as good as over. It was better that she had met John Mullen face to face.

"It's not a bad-lookin' thing, naythur," he said; "an' your face doan't shame it. An' if iver I gits me rise o' wages, Maggie, — well, well! Give me the billet and the parcel, thin; an' shtick the billet within. An' you wait here, jist, till I'm back agin." He took the book be-

tween thumb and finger, charily, and away he went, with his big, muddy boots, as clumsy as ever carried a true heart along above them. When he came back, his hands were clean; and he brought with him a great, red, spotted silk handkerchief, his own, and quite clean, likewise.

"Was there iver a word about wearin' it *back agin*?" he asked shrewdly. And with that, he spread the handkerchief out upon the fresh-springing grass. Maggie, with a lightened heart, took off her head-gear, and laid it down carefully upon the crown, as she had seen her mistress do. Then together they tied up the corners of the kerchief in knots, — true lovers' knots they were, verily; and, with something else that I don't feel bound to tell of, they parted.

"I ain't bad, John," said the girl. "It's only that I never had a whole play-time in my life, and I has to git it by grabs."

Sunday morning came, bright and balmy. Miss Axie had smoothed out the ribbons of her bonnet with a bit of flannel dampened in cologne-water, had dabbed with the same at the oiled tissue crown-lining, and freshened the flowers and lace as best she might. They were comfortably well off, the Keenes; but she could not afford contemptuously to toss aside a bonnet she had just paid fourteen dollars for, and cheap at that, with prices running all the way up to sixty. Besides, after all, it was not much the worse for its adventures; and, if Maggie had only learned a good lesson — Well, Miss Axie went to church now to learn her own lesson.

The Randalls came down the hill, in their pretty, light buggy, — young, happy, loving. Miss Axie sighed, picking her way along in India-rubbers. The "might have been" was whispering again at her heart, yet not all sadly,

either ; for she could catch a sympathetic joy, and under her forty years there was somewhere the heart of twenty, — hiding — *waiting*.

All the Mackies came in together, — six of them, father, mother, the three handsome boys, and the little, winsome girl. And Susan Mackie was two years younger than she. She was glad of all that, too, — glad that it could be. She was like a child, in her inmost heart, before God, — one of many, waiting for her share. Not this, but something. He has plenty ; and everybody gets his own at last.

The sermon was dull. The soul of it had been a glowing thought that had come to the preacher in the nighttime, standing beside his pillow, as the angels stood of old. But he had had to elaborate ; for a man must preach his five-and-twenty minutes, at the least. That had thinned it out, and almost killed it ; and then came “solution of continuity” between him and his hearers. He felt that, and it killed his delivery. For the first three minutes, the angel had stood beside each spirit. Then they had got the whole ; and they went off wandering, every one his way.

Miss Axie let her eyes go round from pew to pew, from group to group. It was the Sunday “out of window.” She could not help it. Her thought thrust itself into each life there, and would have some of it, for these moments at least. And they all lived for her in part, whether they knew it or not, — every one of those filled and answered and well-nigh satisfied souls. And she dreamed her dreams, lived her life over, and fitted it with that which had never been hers.

But she came to her present self with a start by and by, when the sermon seemed to break off suddenly, and had really reached its slow and lingering end, — dying hard,

as people do sometimes, though they have nothing left to live for.

She abased herself in the last prayer, blaming herself before God ; yet He knew she could not help it.

She went home, and took up her Bible to read, in the quietude of her own chamber, — just where she had confronted Maggie yesterday. Where should she open it but at the parable of the unforgiving debtor ? And it came to her then that she herself had gone to do her Master service, in his house, and had been — spiritually — trying on bonnets !

What if she had been taken to task, and made to pay the penalty ? What if her thought had been unmasked before her fellow-worshippers, and shown there in all its foolish guise ? What if they had all seen her there — “just as she was” ?

She had hurt no one ; she had diminished not, by the value of a hair, the worth of that which she had borrowed from her fellows ; she had infringed no ever so trivial right. But the *work* that she had gone into her Master's house to do, and had put by ! The wider work, perhaps, that she had come into His house of life for, and had curtailed and defrauded daily somewhat, through her dreams ! In their lower range, what were her little handmaiden's temptations but the types of hers ?

She sat awhile with her Bible in her hand. Then she got up and rang the bell ; and Maggie came, ashamed and grieved and downcast still. She had not lifted her eyes to her mistress's face all day. Miss Axie went and opened a green box on her bureau, — I am afraid Maggie had peeped into it before now, when she should have been making the bed, — and took out a rose, a pink rose with green leaves. It had only been worn on a

cap. It was quite fresh and delicate. You might almost smell of it.

"You behaved well, Maggie, yesterday, after your fault. I am afraid I was a little hard upon you. Put this in your own bonnet, to wear when you go out this afternoon. And don't be idle, Maggie; though we all have our idle ways, at times."

The tears came up again; and she had no fine bonnet in the way now, and Maggie clapped her hands to her eyes.

"I ain't bad, Miss Axie," she repeated, with the self-same plea she had made to John Mullen; and, unknown to her, the *type* was running still, all through. "But I never had a whole long play-time in my life, an' — I has to git it" — She broke down.

But the love that leaned over them both knew the rest of it, and the appeal of neither came up before its tenderness in vain.

Maggie went down-stairs with a glad face and her rose-blessing. It was a Sunday gift into her dull, hard life. It was a great deal more than just a milliner's flower for a straw bonnet.

Miss Achsah took up her Bible again. She felt as if she would like somebody to give her a rose; something that would make her as simply glad; that she could put into what she had to wear in the world and freshen it all up with some summer beauty.

She opened to the Old Testament: the leaves parted at the beginning of the book of Judges. And she found her own name there. The story of how Achsah, the daughter of Caleb, went to her father, and complained that he had given her the south — the dry — land.

"Give me also springs of water," she said.

“Ah, yes ; springs of water !” sighed Miss Axie, stopping at the line. And then her returning glance read the rest : —

“I will give thee the upper springs and the nether springs.”

Miss Achsah shut the Book with a thanksgiving.

ZERUB THROOP'S EXPERIMENT.

I.

HOW ZERUB LEFT IT ALL TO PROVIDENCE.

ZERUB THROOP sat in his spring-lock sanctum. It was a contrivance of his, whereby it might never be precisely known whether he was out or in ; also, no other person, curious or dishonest, could invade the place to occupy it even for a moment, except with door carefully set wide. He carried the key in his pocket. Once swung to, the heavy leaf fastened itself instantly ; then he and his cigar and his black cat were walled up together. Zerub always kept a black cat. He had had six generations of them, all precisely alike. Where the type varied, the kitten was drowned.

A staircase led down from the passage without to the side entrance of his house. People on errands, or with bills, or to pay money, or receive orders, came here. Zerub could see from his window who it might be.

He had an office directly below, where he made payments, and signed receipts, and gave such other audiences as he chose, holding thus pretty much all his limited intercourse with his kind. Unless he owed a man, or a man owed him, or one or the other wanted for money, money's worth of use, property, or service, what should there be between them ? Zerub Throop always wanted to know that.

He had a little dining-room beyond his office. His

sleeping-room was within his sanctum. What if he should die there some night with his oak sported?

The whole front of his large old house, a place he had taken a whim to buy furnished as it stood, was unused.

He had his head out at his window at this moment at which we take him up. He was watching a woman who had come to the door below with something to sell. She had come from a good way off, peddling her wares, or she would never have climbed Throop Hill.

"Tell the mistress it will be sure to make the hair grow, if it's gone ever so."

"It is n't a mistress, it's a master," said the servant Sarah, from within. "And he don't buy hair-grease; and he won't have peddlers."

"It is n't grease; it's Phoenix Regenerator. It'll" —

"It's no use, I tell you. Not if it would save souls. I tell you he don't buy things." And Sarah, bethinking of her half-ironed shirt-bosom, and her cooling flats, shut the door summarily.

Zerub Throop laughed. The woman looked up.

"My hair never comes out, madam, I assure you," said he with a mocking blandness, and a half bow of his thickly-covered, close-trimmed, grizzled head. "I'm not in the habit of losing things."

"You might, though," she answered, as ready as he. "You might begin; and it's things that never went before that goes worst if they once sets out. When it once begins to drop, you'll" —

"Hammer it in, ma'am! and rivet it on the other side. Good-morning;" and Zerub shut his window.

"Hammer it in! I guess you're used to hammerin' in; feelins and Christian charities and such. Done the undertakin' business pretty much all along, I should say. Well, wait till *you're* hammered in, and riveted on the other side!"

As she walked out of the upper gate upon the hill, another woman rang the bell at the front door. The sound pealed through the house startlingly.

Hardly once in a year did any one ring at Zerub Throop's front door. One had to turn aside from the graveled drive to reach it, across a grass plot. Old vines, little trained or cared for, tangled up the porch-way; but Mrs. Whapshare came to the front door. She had been ten years making up her mind to come at all, — ever since her husband died, and left her poor. Now that her little children were growing up, she had a hundred needs for them that pressed her sorer than the needs of ten years ago. They might go out into the world to make their way; but she wanted life-tools to give them to go out with. Training, knowledge, opportunity, — these things, in the outset, must always cost somebody something. She could not give them bread and butter now and send them to bed. There was other feeding that they were hungry for.

Zerub Throop knew Mrs. Whapshare by sight, as he knew nearly every man and woman in the town; but he had never spoken to her. Why should he? She was no tenant of his. He wanted nothing of her; she could buy nothing of him. The human relation, as Zerub understood it, failed. The wires were down.

Yet Mrs. Whapshare came, and rung at his front door.

"There is a lady, sir, in the northeast room, askin' to speak to you," called Sarah, from outside the oak, not knocking, for she knew now that he was there.

"Why did n't you get rid of her, as you did of the Regenerator?" — half pleased, half surly, at her management; first good, then bad.

"She is n't the regeneratin' sort. She ain't got bottles, nor yet books, nor yet fortygraphs of President Grant

and Mr. Bismarck Brown. There ain't nothin' to send her off *on*. She jest wants to see you. I can tell you who 't is. It's Mis' Whapshare, down Ford Street way. She stepped in as if she'd made up her mind; and it's one of the little ones that makes up with a twist."

Sarah Hand was almost the only person who ever made many words with Zerub Throop; but her words suited and amused him, and she knew it. It was with a sort of crusty good-humor that he went down into the dim and musty northeast parlor, where Sarah had folded back a single shutter, to see Mrs. Whapshare.

The lady rose as he entered, stirring the gloom and must of the corner in which she had seated herself, and gathering up, as it were, the darkness into shape with the shadowy movement of her black dress.

Zerub bowed.

"Mrs. Whapshare," said the lady,— "Mrs. Miles Whapshare."

Zerub sat down, and waited for more.

"I have come to ask you something, Mr. Throop."

"Of course, madam. They all do," answered Mr. Throop politely, drawing down his waistcoat, and leaning back in his chair, laying his right foot across his left knee, and folding his arms, as a human being in a state of siege instinctively barricading himself.

Mrs. Whapshare looked at him quickly. She changed her tone and approach. She was not a timid woman, though she had been ten years making up her mind.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I began wrong. I mean, I came to *tell* you something."

Mr. Throop bowed.

"You owed my husband, Miles Whapshare, fifteen thousand dollars."

"Once I did," answered Mr. Throop.

"Don't you think — I mean *I do* think — you owe his children something now."

"In this country, madam, no one is persecuted for opinion's sake. You have a perfect right to think so, and — to continue thinking so."

Mrs. Whapshare was forced back to her questions. "Don't *you* think so, Mr. Throop?"

"No, madam. I am quite willing to answer any inquiry you would like to make. I do not think so."

Mrs. Whapshare had to put it interrogatively again. Otherwise, it was plain the conversation was to drop, and in like manner would perpetually drop.

"Why, sir?"

"In the first place, madam, three and twenty years ago Miles Whapshare had n't any children. Whatever responsibilities he undertook afterwards, he undertook in the face of his business loss. He began the world again, as I did. I could n't afford children, ma'am. In the second place, I paid him, as I did everybody else, twenty-five cents on the dollar, and was discharged. I began again, and worked up. If Miles Whapshare did n't work up, that is simply the difference between us. In the third place, if I were to call it a debt now, how much do you think the debt would be?"

"I don't know. I don't know as that alters it."

"I'll tell you, then. Upon fifteen thousand dollars I paid Miles Whapshare three thousand seven hundred and fifty, leaving eleven thousand two hundred and fifty. That, at simple interest, would by this time just about have increased by one and a half. Do you think I owe Miles Whapshare's children to-day twenty-eight thousand one hundred and twenty-five dollars? It is either that or nothing."

"I think it is likely it is that, then," replied Mrs.

Whapshare, with a calm indifference to the figures. But they would be glad of a very small proportion."

"Possibly. Miles Whapshare was. But you leave the argument. The grandchildren might come back with their claim, by and by. The world does n't go trailing on after that fashion. When things are squared up, they are squared. There had to be a deluge, once, ma'am, and the race began again. Pope Gregory had to strike ten days out of the year 1582, to bring the world's account down to what the sun could pay: and I believe you think your sins are settled for on much the same principle, don't you? Bankruptcy and discharge seem to be taken into the original plan of things. At any rate, that is what occurs, and there is an accepted order for it. Is this all, madam? and is your mind satisfied?"

And Zerub Throop put down his foot, and arose.

The woman's figure in black moved again also, making that shape of shadow in the gloomy sofa-corner. A voice that trembled now came out of the shade.

"It seemed to me as if it ought to have been, somehow; a few thousand dollars would have been so much to us all this time! and I knew you owed it once. You are rich, Mr. Throop; and you have nobody to keep your money for."

"I can leave it to cats and dogs if I like. I can do as I please with my own."

"You may think you can," said the widow, speaking firmly again; "but it will be as Providence pleases, after all. Even the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord."

"Very well! try Providence; but if Providence is anything like Zerub Throop, it won't do to begin by telling him he owes you an old debt on somebody's else account."

"You know about that Mrs. Whapshare?" Mr. Throop

said, interrogatively, to Sarah Hand, when she was bringing in his dinner, — a roasted duck with port-wine sauce. "She's a pretty comfortable sort of person, I should think."

"Well," answered Sarah, "folks is most alwers pretty comfortable, ain't they, 'xcept the regular give-up starvation ones? You see 'em goin' round; and they has shoes an' stockins on, an' gowns, an' bunnits, or coats and hats; an' they goes in somewheres when it rains, or it comes night; an' they git breakfast, an' dinner, an' supper, I s'pose, or else they would n't *be* goin' round. You don't see 'em droppin' nowheres. Of course, they 're comfortable. Everybody gets shook down into some sort of a place. The world's like a hoss-car: they git in an' they git out; an' they've been took along between. Some sets down, and some stands up, and some hangs on to the straps. Some gits into a place at the beginning, and some slips into one when somebody else gits out. There don't seem to be no rule about it; it regilates itself."

"But Mrs. Whapshare? — she lives in a good house."

"They can't eat shingles and timbers, though. 'Tain't like little King Boggins."

"She has a roof over her head, however, and it is her own. She has several children."

"More. She's got six."

"All grown up?"

"Well, the everidge of 'em is. Charlotte, she's eleven. Miles Whapshare died ten years ago, and did n't leave much of anything but the old house and the garding and the six children and a mess of old store-books full of bad debts and tribulations."

"Been to school?"

"Children? Yes, an' meetin', an' Sunday-school, right straight along. John, he's got a place in a store. They're

nice folks enough. Mis' Whapshare ain't got much force to her, though."

"I should think she had done pretty well under the circumstances."

"That's just it. She's a woman that's always been under a lot of 'em, — clear down. What business do folks have to be under the circumstances, I wonder? Why don't they get on top of 'em? What is circumstances made for?"

"To *stand round*, Sarah," said Mr. Throop, in italics. "If you knew Latin, you'd see. That's what we've got to do with 'em. Keep 'em in their places. Make 'em stand round!"

"Or *git*," said Sarah, sententiously.

Mr. Throop laughed.

"Bring me a lemon," he said; and Sarah, having done that, understood that the conversation was at an end, and withdrew, like a circumstance, into the kitchen.

The one course over, Zerub went, as was his custom, upstairs to his wine, his dessert, and his cigar. He never ate pastry. A little fruit was set upon the round table in his sanctum, also a basket of small sweet biscuits, — these more especially for the benefit of the cat, to whom he fed them; beside these, a bottle with cap of tinfoil over the cork, his cigar-holder, tray, and match-box. In this company Mr. Throop always read his papers after dinner for an hour. The cat, when she had got biscuits enough, dozed beside him on a soft, square sofa-cushion, flung down, for her use, upon the floor. Zerub pulled her ears once in a while, and woke her up to tell her the news and what he thought about it.

"She knows, and she don't contradict," said he. To-day, he did not read long.

"They'll get into a nice mess in Europe; won't they,

Tophet? They 've got to, sooner or later; that 's what I told the Whapshare woman. The world 's never safe from a muddle but when it 's just out of one; and if you can't be safe then for a while, what 's the use of the muddle? Hey, old cat?"

Tophet rose lazily, stretched out her fore-legs to their farthest possible extent, stretched up her hind ones, lifting her back into a heap, and dropping her neck into a hollow; then gathered herself together again, with raised and vibrant tail, and rubbed and coiled herself round her master's ankles.

"I wonder how it would seem to do it, old cat? I wonder what she would think herself, if I really did? See here now;" and Mr. Throop drew forth his great wallet, and therefrom took a slip of white paper, such as he kept ready for bills and receipts. He dipped a pen into an ink-stand that stood upon the table, and wrote four lines.

"That would do it."

He was only thinking now, not soliloquizing. Mr. Throop never did that foolish thing; he only talked out now and then, in scraps, to the cat.

He sat holding that which he had from a queer impulse written, fancying queer what-ifs about it.

"That would do it. Give that woman this slip of paper, and it turns her life right over for her, t'other side up again, — the side she has n't seen for ten, twenty years, perhaps, by that time, no, nor ever; and it alters six lives after hers.

"I don't suppose anybody ever wrote exactly such a note as that; could n't be discounted. It would stand good, though, when the time came. Mrs. Whapshare, two things are between you and this slip of paper, — my will, and my life. I can, and I can *not*. There comes in free agency, and all the rest of it. It is certain that I

either shall or shall *not* turn this freak into fact. Certain somewhere. Where? In time, or Providence? Providence *may* meddle with such things; but I never came across Providence amongst 'em, that's all. I've had my way to work up; and I've been left pretty much to myself; and I've worked it. I'm left to myself now. Am I, though? How do I know?

"See here, what if I do neither? What if I leave it to Providence to finish it, if it will?"

There was a small blank in one of the four lines. Zerub Throop dipped his pen again, and filled the space with two words. He turned it over, and indorsed it with a date and a sentence. Then he laid down the pen, and sat folding and rolling the paper abstractedly several minutes until he held it in a tight round, like a very small Catherine-wheel, between his finger and his thumb.

"Would it ever fire off?" he wondered.

In the same whimsical, half voluntary way, as if letting his vagary, that he might stop at any point, run on with him, he tore a bit of tinfoil from the sheath that had covered his bottle, and rolled it again, carefully and compactly, in that. He folded and pressed and smoothed the foil around it, and welded it into a silvery ball.

"Did you ever see a secret, Tophet?" he said to the cat. "That's a secret. That's the sort of thing it is, when you take it out of your mind and look at it."

Then he sat holding it again, amusing himself so, — playing passively, as it were, with fate and possibility, — others' fate that he thought he held; first in his own mind and will, — now, since he had taken it out and looked at it, between his thumb and finger.

But what was he to do next, or not to do, seeing he had given it up to Providence? Providence would neither put it by, out of his thumb and finger, nor throw it away.

"I won't destroy the thing," he said. "I'll go as far as that, and then it is out of my hands. I'll leave it loose on creation. Things have to go somewhere. What difference will it make to me?"

He laid it out of his fingers on the table, — anywhere, as it happened to fall.

"That's all between you and me, Tophet," he said.

"Ni—ai—o!" answered the cat.

"And — the post, Tophet; you and me and the post. What do people mean by the post?"

Then he took his hat and cane, and went off for his afternoon walk.

Zerub Throop was not an ill-souled man; he was only a strange, solitary one, — grown selfish and one-viewed through solitariness, and through having "worked his way up."

Sarah Hand came up-stairs, found the door hooked back that she might enter, carried off the empty bottle, the fruit-basket, and the torn bit of tinfoil that was evidently rubbish, beside it. She picked up the round bright ball, looked at it, turned it over, saw that it was folded, not crumpled, and laid it into the little grooved lid at the top of Mr. Throop's writing-desk, to keep company with an old knife, a bit of sealing-wax, some used pens, and a piece of India-rubber. Sarah Hand never "cleared up" anything that could by any possibility ever be called for or thought of again. There were old bits of paper, scribbled with temporary calculations, tucked between the leaves of his blotting-book, thrust into his match-box, and clasped among the notes and scraps in his little gilt finger-clip, that had been dusted over and replaced for month after month, even year after year.

So, when Zerub came home, there the secret lay, taken care of by Providence and Sarah Hand. There it con-

tinued to lie for several weeks ; till, one day, when he lifted the grooved lid to find something that was underneath, the silvery ball rolled out at the end, and upon the table, and down to the floor.

Zerub looked at it. "It's out of my keeping," said he ; "I've nothing to do with it." And he let it lie.

Sarah Hand picked it up when she swept next day, and dropped it into the bronze match-box, where it fell to the bottom, among some stray tacks and screws and buttons that were safe there from being lost or wasted, and also from ever being drafted to any earthly use.

Zerub did not ask for it, or look for it. It had fairly got beyond his knowledge now, as when one willfully loses count of some sound or motion one has pained one's self involuntarily in following, and is thankful to let go. One night, months after, he upset his match-box in the dark. The dust that fell from it got brushed up in the morning, the tacks and screws and buttons put back again, and nobody, of course, thought of or recollected anything more ; until, that same afternoon, sitting with his wine and his paper and his cigar, Zerub saw the cat claw something from under the edge of the low, broad base of his round table, give it a pat, to try if it had life and fun in it, and send it shining across the floor.

"Why, that's" — said Zerub ; but before he came to the exclamation-point at the end of his sentence, Tophet was after it again ; and a second buffet drove it straight before his eyes to the one possible spot where it could get lost out of that room, — down the open lips of the old-fashioned, brass-valved register.

"That's all !" said Zerub, with a deliberate period. "Nothing is lost while you know where it is. But it's none of our business ; is it, black cat ?"

They two knew ; and they never told.

Afterwards, Zerub Throop lived on for the space of two years and five months, and gathered to himself his interests and his dividends, and smoked his cigar daily after his dinner; but he never spoke again with Miles Whapshare's widow, or put her name again to any paper that he wrote or caused to be written; and at the end of this time, suddenly, and in the midst of his strength, he turned away from all these things, as if he had never striven for or possessed them, and went, as we all go, to "work his way" up farther.

II.

HOW IT WAS WITH THE WHAPSHARES.

Mrs. Whapshare went out through the tangled porch, and heard Mr. Throop draw the rusty bolt behind her. There was an odd blank in her mind as she walked down the hill into the town again, as if she had taken some hope up there with her that she had been long used to, and had buried it, and was coming back into her life alone, without it.

It had been, all these ten years, a kind of vague assurance to her to see Zerub Throop go by, up and down the street, and to think to herself, "That man failed, and owed my husband eleven thousand dollars that he could not pay. He has got it now, and plenty more; I've a great will to go, some day, and remind him of it."

It helped her, — this undefined hope and half-intent, — almost unconsciously, through many a hard pinch. She had a nut that she might yet crack, as they do in fairy tales, when they get to the worst; and who knew what might come of it? Anything, everything, might; and, so long as there is a "might" in one's life, one can go on; it is a reserve in the army of one's forces.

This morning she had gone and cracked her nut; and there had come out of it black ashes.

She looked so tired when she came in, that Martha, her daughter, did not tell her that the soup was burned; but she smelled it, coming in out of the fresh air. Burnt peas are pungent.

"There's our dinner gone!" said she.

"No," spoke out Caroline from the kitchen; and she opened, with a gay clatter, the oven-door. "Smell my potato puff; and we've an omelet just ready; and you're to have a cup of tea, with a tablespoonful of cream that I got off the bowl for you this morning."

That was Caroline Whapshare's way with things. Martha took them harder.

"I think the soup is always burned for us," she would say. "There's a wrong somewhere, that things should be so."

She was like the Jews, who asked, "Who hath sinned, this man or his parents?"

Caroline had the Christ-answer ready.

"Not so much a wrong, maybe, as something to be set gloriously right. How good it will be when the sun breaks out in the west, Mattie!"

"Yes, away down; just a strip for the last minutes under the clouds, when the day is all gone."

"Even then, it is not as if there were not another coming."

"That does not help the Johnnie feeling."

Now, when John Whapshare had been a little boy, he had given the household this compound substantive and a proverb. They were trying to comfort him for a childish disappointment, by telling him of the good time he was to have next week, at Thanksgiving. "Ye-es," he persisted, sobbing with undiminished vigor; "but what kind of a time be I a-havin' now?"

Martha thought the family had been brought up on the Johnnie feeling.

"Mother has lost something," she said to Caroline, over the dinner dishes, that day. "She looks as if she had had something put away, and had gone to get it, and it was not there."

"What queer ideas you have, Mattie!"

"Maybe. I feel all sharpened up, as if I knew things through the ends of my fingers. Queer ideas come of queer living. What are we going to do with that old straw matting for winter?"

"It was rather a pity in the beginning. Children do scrape their chairs so!"

"Well, it's the end now; and it has only lasted a year. It is terribly expensive to be poor, Car. If we had had a good ingrain for half as much again, it would have lasted six years."

"I'll tell you what I have thought of," said Car. "That northeast parlor, — we cannot do much with it in cold weather. What is the use of having a best room when you cannot have an every-day one? We are right on the corner of the street; we might let it for fifty or sixty dollars a year; and then there would be the carpet and all the things to spare. We could fill up with them splendidly for ever so long."

"That very best Brussels carpet?"

"Well, yes; twenty-two years old, is it not? Older than either you or I, Mattie; which is all the reason we venerate it so. It was the best when we were born; and we were never allowed to have any crumbs over it. It is not handsome."

"But let a room? Who to, or what for?"

"To some comfortable old maid; or for an office, or a shop, or anything. Why should we care? I believe I shall put it into mother's head."

"How we should miss it in summer! — our only cool, shady place!"

"It is a good thing to let things go when you do not miss them. Then, when the missing time comes round, you rub along somehow. That's the way, too, for poor folks to give. I've something else to propound, Mattie, some time; and I don't know whether to do it all in a heap, or to wait another year. For it must be a winter-strained notion too."

"I think when you are pretty well thumped already is the time to take another. You might as well keep on hammering."

"We might — sell — our — garden — for fifteen hundred dollars, Martha Whapshare!"

The first few words came slow and hard, trying their way as they came, Caroline's eye fixed closely upon Martha's face. The last all ran together in a great hurry and triumph.

"We might — all get into our — caskets!" answered Martha, with a sepulchral indignation. "You would leave us just about room enough."

"Lydia ought to have those organ lessons that she wants so much, and an organ to practise on. It would be a profession for her."

"How do you know?"

Caroline opened her eyes at her sister. "Why, of course it would. Are they not building new churches everywhere, all the time? and are not all the women taking to preaching, which will leave a capital chance for anybody that is willing just to glorify at the other end, without being seen of men?"

"Pshaw! I don't mean that. How do you know about the garden?"

"I asked Rufus Abell. He knows. I would n't go at mother, and stir her up for nothing, you see."

Martha rubbed the cover of a potato-dish silently for a full minute, looking at nothing, with that "setness" in her features, — her eyelids fixed at half-mast, neither lifting nor falling, a white pinch in the end of her nose, and the corners of her mouth crowded down with the close shutting of her small jaws, — as if her indignation at life were held in somewhere behind her face, as a smoker takes in and holds tobacco smoke.

"She held her breath, and the mad went out at her ears," she said once of herself when she was a child.

"I think it is a very prettily managed world," she remarked quietly, when she had put the dish-cover down and shaken out the towel. "All Oregon and Alaska empty at one end, and people crowded out of their door-yards at the other. I'm going to talk to mother about it."

While "the mad went out at her ears," Martha's mind was always calmly made up to the inevitable. Her mother had lost some might, could, would, or should, to-day; she had seen that; she might as well piece out the conditionals for her. Martha Whapshare said her mother lived in the conditional mood.

Caroline knew how it would be beforehand; it was the regular circumlocution of things in the family. She had the ideas. Martha growled at and presented them; Mrs. Whapshare laid them up among the mights, coulds, woulds, shoulds; now and then one was drawn out in an emergency, and acted upon.

Rufus Abell came, and measured the garden-piece. Rufus Abell was surveyor, real-estate agent, broker, lawyer, executor, what-not, to half the people, living or dead, who had, or had had, interests in Rintheroots.

There were thirty-two hundred square feet: "it would sell," he said, "for fifty cents a foot; that would be sixteen hundred dollars." Mrs. Whapshare went to bed

with sixteen hundred dollars in her pocket of possibilities. On the strength of that, they had sirloin steak for dinner the next day. That did all the family good ; in regular turn, it would have been salt fish, — “one of the make-believe days,” Martha called it ; when the dinner was got over, and no one dined. They made believe, at regular intervals, with salt cod, baked beans, pea-soup, and liver. That left three days in the week for something real, — two at first-hand, and one warmed up.

Mr. Abell also put a notice up at the post-office, and into the village paper, of a desirable corner-room to let in a dwelling-house, in a central locality, suitable for a single lady or a professional man ; apply to him.

A great many people applied, — two washer-women ; a horse-car conductor with a wife and seven children ; an intelligence-office keeper ; the teacher of a boys' private school. At last a young doctor, newly come to the neighborhood, Arthur Plaice, got it ; paid twenty dollars in advance for the first quarter, twelve of which Caroline Whapshare took to the city the next day, and paid, also in advance, for the same length of time, for a Mason and Hamlin organ. This came out on the same express-wagon that brought Dr. Plaice's desk and arm-chair and bookshelves.

They got acquainted with their tenant over the unloading and bringing in. The ladies Whapshare had been rather shy of him before.

He helped the expressman bring in the great box into their sitting-room ; then he stayed, and unscrewed it for them, and drew the instrument safely out, according to directions ; then, when they opened it, and wondered how it would sound, and what Lydia would say when she came home, he put a chair before it, and seated himself, opened the stops, and touched the keys with a few beautiful glad

chords, and played what Caroline always called afterward, the "Which being interpreted." It had in it struggles and changes, and snatches of comfort, and little climbing-up-hill notes, and sure high ones, and droppings and sobbings down again; yes, and "the very little pinches too, that nobody noticed but the pinched people;" and it had the great reach and longing; and, at last, a grasp and a joy, and a gentle flood of bright content, that filled the room and all their hearts as they listened, just as the sunset and the home pleasantness filled it, and glorified its new aspect; with the best things brought in for every day, and the "real Brussels," faded though it might be, on the floor, and the organ standing in the shady corner.

The old maid, Miss Suprema Sharpe, lived right opposite, and could see, over her blinds, all that occurred. What she did not see, she heard; and what she did not hear, she imagined; and what she saw, heard, or imagined, of a morning, for example, she ran up street, of an afternoon, and told to her friend, Mrs. Benny Dutell, while it was warm; just as she might carry ginger-cakes.

She was not a bad old maid, either; that is, she did not mean to be. She only lived all alone, and there did not much happen to her. Nine from four you can't; so you borrow ten. Miss Suprema went borrowing ten all along the line. She got things mixed up sometimes, and her sums would n't prove.

Mrs. Benny Dutell was the postmaster's wife; what came to her never grew cool in her hands; so that you had your own story passed round to you again presently, or even beforehand; as if it had got ahead of the sun round the world, — by the way of Upper Five Corners, or Lower Green Point.

Dr. Plaiice had hardly gone away into his office, when Miss Suprema came "perpendicularizing" over. She walked

very stiff and straight and quick ; so that she seemed like a stick shot broadside, instead of endwise, keeping its uprightness as it went ; or as a water-spout or a sand-column, that slides tall and swift from horizon to horizon, without a motion or a swaying, save determinately on.

Nothing prevented Miss Suprema from getting over sooner, and meeting Dr. Plaice there, but an *embarras des richesses*. She stood in the middle of her bedroom, and fairly spun when she saw the furniture going in, and the big box, marked "Cabinet Organ," slid over the threshold along a board ; when she spied by the strong western light shining in level through the room, the busy group about it unpacking ; and when Dr. Plaice sat down and began to play. Her bonnet was in the closet ; and she would have to turn her back, and disturb her hearing, to fetch it and put it on ; besides, if she did, — which way ? She was in a hurry to get to Mrs. Benny's before the sun went down upon her pheese ; and she was eager to gather more to go with to-morrow. She wanted to run right in among the Whapshares, and she did not want to "stop things ;" the end was, that she came in upon their comfortable twilight complacency, waiting for Lydia's return and rapture.

"Well, I declare ! You *are* spread out !"

Miss Suprema looked round the room beamingly. She looked at the carpet, and the gray moreen curtains, and the marble-topped pier-table ; she did not mean to see everything all at once ; she let the organ wait in its shady corner.

"No, Miss Suprema," said Caroline ; "not spread out ; only drawn in. The syrup is boiled down, that is all."

"To a richness ! Well, how elegant you do look ! You won't let it make any difference towards me, will you ; but I may run in neighborly just the same, if I rub my feet well ?"

Miss Suprema had quick little looks, that she sent everywhere out of her round brown eyes like a squirrel's; never moving her body, that sat straight up from the edge of her chair, but only her head. Lydia Whapshare said all she wanted was a bushy tail, and a nut between her forepaws. But, to do her full credit, the nut was seldom lacking, metaphorically; and the tale was bushy enough by the time she ran up the road again with it, along under the wall.

With her swift continued peeps, she was the first to see Dr. Arthur Plaice, standing again in the doorway of the room in the increasing twilight.

"Can you lend me a hammer for a moment, Mrs. Whapshare?" he asked.

And while Mrs. Whapshare went for the hammer, Suprema Sharpe had a good look at him, with what light there was at her own back, and full in his face.

He was a very handsome man, she saw that, with a square, firm figure, not over-tall, a calm equipoise in look and attitude, and all the indescribable bearing of a gentleman, that shows itself whether he stands quietly waiting, or moves and speaks.

He neither came into the room, nor withdrew shyly, but simply stood where the last natural act left him, until it should be time for the next. Self-consciousness, which is neither ladylike nor gentlemanly, always has to do something between. Dr. Plaice could make a pause. When Mrs. Whapshare brought him the hammer, he thanked her and turned away.

"So that's him?" said Miss Suprema.

"That is Dr. Plaice," replied Mrs. Whapshare.

"Young, is n't he?"

"I dare say. I do not know his age."

"Just beginning. Well, you won't be much knocked

up nights yet a while. To be sure, he's got the little east door to himself. It'll be sociable evenings. It's a good plan to have somebody there. I wonder you never thought of it before. You did n't really want that room. If you had only made up your mind last year, there was little Lot Green looking everywhere for a place to put up his sign, and begin turnin' at law. You would n't have had much company of him, though, for his evenings were spoken for; and it would n't have been permanent, because he's married now, and keeping house and office all together. I guess it happened right as it is."

"We had only just come through to the bare floor here," said Martha, bluntly; "and I don't suppose we shall have much to do with Dr. Plaice's evenings."

"He's right in the house, anyway; and there's always hammers and things; you'll get acquainted. Well, I must go. I only looked in for a minute. I'll come again. If anything should happen that I should n't be able to come, you know, why, there's the doctor; and one of my little quinsies might be an encouragement to him."

She fairly forgot the organ, after all.

She stood on the sidewalk for a moment, when she had got out, with a flapping in her mind that she was subject to, like a sail in a flaw of wind. She trimmed her decisions, however, quickly, and laid her course direct for Mrs. Dutell's.

She must go, sundown or not. She had a little joke on the tip of her tongue that tingled. Keep it overnight? She might as well have tried to keep a Spanish fly there.

She was in too much of a hurry with it, though, when she reached Mrs. Benny's.

"It's easy enough to guess now what will *take Plaice!*" she cried right out, without preface.

"La! what?" said Mrs. Benny Dutell.

Then Miss Suprema saw that she had begun at the wrong end of her little joke, and spoiled it. I am viciously glad she did. I am glad she found out once in a while, in her own small way, which was all the way she could, how good it is to have things tipped out in a hurry, wrong end foremost. There are two kinds of gossip, — the one that purely invents or recklessly misrepresents; and the one that shrewdly spies, puts this and that together, guesses, and anticipates; and the latter is indescribably the most aggravating. It was Miss Suprema's sort.

You can sit in your own room complacently, with a three weeks' influenza, and be told from outside that you have got the varioloid, or a softening of the brain; or that you have quarreled with your wife or husband, and run away. All that will right itself; but to be informed that you are about to give out invitations to a party, or publish a book, or go to Europe, when you can't say you have n't it in your mind, or to be "speered at" in regard to an impending engagement in your family, which you can neither declare nor deny, — to be told your own news before it is news, — I wonder if that was not the devil's fine art in torturing Job? His friends came to tell him of all these things, which was all they were left alive for. I think he must have wished they had not been left alive, and that he could have found the things out quietly in time for himself.

This looking over shoulders spiritually into the page of a life that is barely being written, this picking pockets of personal experience, is the mean enormity of which the literal prying into private letters, or stealing porte-monnaies, are only feeble types. Yet the social pickpockets run about safely and respectably, spending their stolen change, and there is no house of correction for them.

Arthur Plaise had not got his clothes hung up in his

closet, or his books put up on their shelves, before all that might happen, — well, all that did happen, for what is the use of trying to keep the story back after a Miss Suprema has seized hold of it? — was an “I told you so!” in Rintheroote.

There are two ways in which very ordinary men are influenced by this social force which is brought to bear upon their doings (doings, I mean, which tend, or may drift, matrimonially), and of which they usually become aware before the women do. It either frightens them off, or frightens them on. Arthur Plaice showed his manhood in that it did neither with him.

He was probably well aware that all Rintheroote was peeping and noticing, guessing and prophesying; yet he went in and out just the same, coming into easy and natural contact with the Whapshare family, living along precisely as if his life had been let alone.

Caroline, the pretty one, and the obvious one, of the Whapshare girls, shielded by this simple “grit,” as Robert Collyer would call it, of the young doctor, from the shame and harassment that many a delicate girl does have to go through, — that I have seen delicate girls suffer from, — of knowing that a thing has been surmised impertinently, and that he has heard it, and is shy or cool in consequence, — Caroline Whapshare went on innocently and quietly, and kept her little school up-stairs.

There was nothing said about the school before? No; because we came in at the Whapshares', out of school-hours, at dinner-time, when the pea-soup was burning; and in the afternoons the little children did not come.

Caroline Whapshare had not served an apprenticeship to any system. She had never been inside a kindergarten; but she had a garden for little children in her heart, as every woman has who is born with the genius of

motherhood in her, — a place full of blessed waiting growths and living images of truth, vital and simple with the child-instinct in them, — that has never died out of her, but flowers forth in its heavenly use when the children come, as it was ordained.

She was full of little, bright teaching thoughts. Things came to her in clear, happy object-fashion. She delighted to tell them again to little, growing souls, or even to think how she might do it. She felt always, going through the pleasant mind-and-spirit places, just as she did once in riding through a beautiful country, full of farm cheeriness and woodland beauty, and far-away, unhaunted nooks and seclusions. "Oh, what lovely places to be a little child in!"

So she brought out of all her school knowledge and her later readings, fresh, charming applications. There was nothing old and trite with her; nothing that only letters and syllables stood for. The object, the very thing itself taught of, was palpable to her imagination; and she made it palpable to the child, in words quick from the live sense in herself, or in some quaint, clever, bewitching little improvised play. She kept a kindergarten without knowing it, or setting it up to be such.

Martha could not keep school; she should not have the patience, she said. She did the Martha-work, and was cumbered, and sometimes cross, poor girl! with much serving.

There were times in that square upper south chamber, where the sun came in on the bare floor, and where three benches and three little rows of desks formed three sides of a quadrangle, and the fireplace was the fourth, with the teacher's table in the corner between it and the window, — times that those little souls will never forget for their early blessedness; times of reciting that were like

play, and play-times that were like — oh ! what were they like ? — when they went “ round the barberry-bush,” or “ hunted the squirrel through the wood, and lost him and found him ;” or sang “ Chickany, chickany, craney crow,” and ran from the fox that was after the brood of them. Why, those four plain walls, and that bare floor, and the three little low benches that they jumped over for safety, were to them all wild and beautiful nature, full of fables and fairy tales that they were playing out. And Caroline Whapshare was just as young and as pleased, and as full of “ make-believe ” and “ certain-true ” as any of them.

I think it was the little school, as much as anything, that Arthur Plaice fell in love with.

All winter long the little feet, trudging up and down the long back stairs, and the little voices, shrill and sweet and happy, sounded into his heart, and told tales there ; and all winter long the sight of Caroline Whapshare's face, fair and sunshiny, grew to be to him a daily bread of blessing that his life had waited for.

He did spend many an evening in the cosy home room, where they were “ having the good of their best things ;” he helped Charlotte with her sums, and he mended Miles's skates ; he went off skating with them all, boys and girls, up the shining river, in the still, keen moonlight ; he brought home nuts sometimes, and cracked and picked them, and Martha made pan-candy ; he read aloud lovely stories, and books of curious fact, while the sewing-baskets were out and the needles were busy ; he showed John how to carve brackets and boxes ; he played for them upon the organ ; and on Sunday evenings they all sang together glorious and tender hymns, or listened while he drew forth from the stops and keys the grand, beautiful meanings of Handel and Beethoven.

He brought into the house a wealth of resource and

companionship ; and in return he received — home. He had not had a home before for fifteen years ; there had only been for him school and college, and the world.

Why could not people let them all alone, to take what God was giving, and to make their simple history ?

All the while, the vulgar, hurrying gossip was going about, robbing the sweet, unconscious time that lives have a right to before they find out their own whole secrets ; interfering, concluding, spoiling. For while Caroline knew nothing of it, because they guarded her so, and because she had that kind of dignity that silly impertinence could never approach directly, Arthur Plaice and her mother each came to know it separately quite well ; and each felt at last uncomfortably responsible.

Dr. Plaice was not scared nor small about it. He had no little pitiful, provoked corner in his mind, ever so far back, in which he visited upon Caroline Whapshare the annoyance he certainly did feel. Her face was just as dear and sunshiny to him as ever ; and he let her see just as plainly the reflected shine in his. But he knew that he had a long waiting-time before him in his life ; and he had a conscience : these two things made a difference.

He began to be busy in his office, or to be called away now and then, more frequently than he had used. Mrs. Whapshare had ripping, untidy, or bulky work up-stairs sometimes, and carried off the large kerosene lamp from below to do it by ; and where mother was, there was always the household. Even Miss Suprema could see that they were not always now “ lit up and waiting ” in the curtained room. Lydia had a candle, and practised all alone, often ; that was dull. It was all duller than it had been ; they hardly knew when it began to change, but the winter grew a great deal wearier toward the end.

It made no difference ; they could not defend them-

selves; gossip would have something. Dr. Plaice was "cooling off" now; the Whapshares had "taken hold rather too strong;" "all the time never held out;" "it would do Dr. Plaice more good, as a young physician, to go about and become acquainted generally." "And what could it amount to? Neither of them had anything." "It was strange a woman of Mrs. Whapshare's experience had n't had more judgment."

Some of these things crept round at last to Martha's knowledge. They made her harder and sharper than ever. She said nothing about them; but she was brusque, even rude, now and then, to Arthur Plaice; she was abrupt with her mother, and with Caroline she was like a thorn-hedge, bristling and thrusting sharp points at her continually, by way of sheltering her in.

Yet, as Suprema Sharpe herself had said, he was "there right in the house; and there were always hammers and things." Some pleasant hours were natural, inevitable; he could not always be denying himself; neither could even Martha be always on guard against what there might be no real danger of, and at any rate was nobody's business.

The days lengthened, and the spring came round. Mrs. Whapshare had taken Rufus Abell's advice, and, instead of selling her garden lot, had given him a two-years' mortgage upon the whole place, for which he had lent her the sixteen hundred dollars. At the end of that time, he told her, if things were not easier for her somehow, she could sell at an advanced value, pay up the mortgage, and have something left. Meanwhile, as Mrs. Whapshare said, the children would have two years more of breathing-time before she walled them in.

III.

HOW THE COMET TOLD TALES, AND SET THE SOLAR SYSTEM IN COMMOTION.

The houses on the east, or rather southeast side of Ford Street opened by their front and back doors into two different worlds, as the lives of men also do.

One way, there was the dusty, glaring highroad, with the street-cars running up to the corner; the bank, the post-office, the shops, the town-pump, and the hay-scales, all in sight, and constituting what New England people call "the prospect."

The other way, there was green grass, a sloping bank, the shade of trees and wild shrubs, secret stillness and beauty; and the broad, slow river widened out above the dams.

Nobody would have thought it, going by along the front. Nobody would have thought that behind the commonplace village, with its houses crowding right on to the thoroughfare, was this escape into a hidden and wonderful delight. People did not remember it, although they knew, who lived on the other side, and had close back-yards, stopped short by the yards of Chaffer Street.

The little children knew. Little children always know.

Half Caroline Whapshare's teaching was done, in pleasant weather, out on the "back slope." There was a real barberry-bush to run around; there were beautiful hiding-places for the "chickens," and sly corners for the "fox." Above all, there was room for the planets.

Dr. Plaice came through the long hall of the old house, one day in May, drawn by the open-air chatter of little voices like loosened brooks. He stood there a minute or

two in the end door, looking on at a wonderful game, — no less than the game of the Stars in their Courses.

The roundabout, which dried the clothes on Monday, had its long arms taken out, and piled away beside the fence. To the swivel at the top of its centre-post were fastened stout twine strings, longer and shorter; and each of these was held at its farther end by a little scholar, who, drawing by its tether to a greater or less distance, and keeping the line taut, was joyously revolving in a prescribed orbit, to the time of a tune which Caroline, seated on a low stool at the centre, and personating the Sun, sang to them as the music of the spheres.

Little golden-haired Mercury — the youngest pet pupil, Robie Lewiston — trotted around close by her feet; occulted now and then against her lap when he grew tired. A pretty eight-years-old Venus, sunny-eyed and ringleted, came next; and then sober, clear-faced, pleasant Ruth Fellman, for Earth. Mars was a sturdy, rollicking, rather unmanageable fellow; Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, were the big scholars, in the edge of their teens. Farther into space Caroline did not try to go; nor could she, without getting into the river. It was enough for all practical purposes.

By and by (this was the best part of the play) Caroline lifted up her hand, and forth started a comet from behind a gooseberry-bush. From away down by the bank of the river he came, describing his parabola among the planets, bearing down toward the Sun, crossing orbit after orbit, but never when the heavenly body was there. This was the "steering." It was as great fun as coasting down hill among multitudinous sleds. He took his sight from the start, and threaded his way, bobbing under the lines, and, wheeling at length close around with little Mercury, shot off again upon the other side. Dimmy Pickett did it; a

pennon of white muslin, fastened around his head, flew behind him. This was the comet's tail. Dimmy was only seven years old, little, and bright. A larger, duller boy could not have done it.

When the play was over, the planets, out of breath, came up around the Sun ; and the Sun asked them questions.

"What are the strings meant for?"

"Gravitation, that ties them to the sun."

"What is your pulling away as far as you can for?"

"Centrifugal force, that makes them fly off."

"What do both together do?"

"Keep them going round and round just in their own separate places."

"Are there really strings up in the sky?" asked little Venus.

Caroline held up her finger and beckoned to Venus. Venus came.

"Why did you come to me? I did not pull you with the string."

"You beckoned."

"God beckons."

All the little planets were still. There was silence in their heaven for the space of half a minute.

Then Dimmy Pickett spoke.

"Suppose she had had her back turned?"

"Every little atom in the whole world of worlds has its face toward God."

"What do they pull away for, then?"

"God gives them a will of their own, to go a little way of their own; but they cannot get beyond his will. The two wills make the beautiful glad motions, and all the life and the glory.

"There are anemones down by the spring. Who will come this afternoon and go with me to gather them?"

Caroline had given them their bit of physics and metaphysics. It was enough for this time.

Everybody would go and gather anemones, — everybody but big Jupiter. He did not say anything; he wanted to play football.

"May I go too?" asked Dr. Plaice, coming over from the door.

Caroline had sat with her back toward him. She started a little, and flushed.

"It is the children's walk. Will you have Dr. Plaice go too?" she asked them.

"He does n't belong," whispered Venus, shyly.

"Oh! I'm the new planet, — the far, far-away one, that only comes in sight once in — ever so long. I've been a good while getting here. But I'm discovered now, and must be counted in. I belong; truly I do."

Something made the pretty Sun change color yet more at this. Among them all, nobody had the presence of mind to say him nay. So the doctor said he would come, and bring his microscope with him. After the tremendousness of things in general, they might like to descend to something small and particular.

Dimmy Pickett stood staring, in a queer, bright, eager way, while the plan was settled. He looked at the doctor and at Caroline, as if he were making a bewildering computation, astronomical or otherwise, too large for his small head.

Caroline did not notice; she was busy with little Mercury. But the doctor saw it, and had an end-of-the-world instinct that the comet was bearing down upon him.

All at once, the erratic little luminary did bear down upon the Sun, displacing Mercury.

"See here!" said he, breaking out with a shy bravado in a child's loud whisper. "I know something, Miss Caroline, — I do; only Flipper told me not to tell."

"Then," said innocent Caroline, "be sure you don't. You won't ever be a man, — a splendid, honorable man, — if you tell things that you ought not. And say 'Philippa.' Your sister has a pretty name; but 'Flipper' is n't pretty."

"Everybody calls her 'Flipper.' She is 'Flipper'!" returned the Comet, half inclined to be a little sulky. He had expected to have his secret teased out of him.

Dr. Plaice caught the last sentences as he turned away quickly, for fear of what might come next. He walked back into his office with an excited perplexity in his mind.

How long could he save Caroline from this? And what ought he to do? Go away? or stay, and do that which he had hardly made up his mind would be right to do?

He sat down in his corner-chair, near which the little passage and the blinded east door were open, letting in the soft summer of a few hours that the May day was giving.

He had hardly sat there two minutes, when little steps came by around the corner, and little heavenly bodies — three or four — made a constellation just outside the folded blinds.

He could see them as they stood. The Comet looked big and red and portentous; little Venus was sparkling and coaxing.

"Tell me, Dimmy; just me, you know."

And Earth and Jupiter crowded up close also to hear.

"I s'pose Flipper meant not to tell *her*; besides, she's always telling everybody not to tell everything. And they do. She does."

"Grown-up people tell the most, I think," said Venus, gravely. "They keep all the telling and all the cake, and say it is n't good for children. Is it about us, Dimmy?"

"I told you 't was. By least it would be some time. She said it would be a forever vexation."

"Vacation, you mean, Dimmy," said elder Earth.

"I say vexation at home; and Flipper says it is vexation. So now," said Dimmy.

"I should n't like a forever vacation," said Ruth Fellman, waiving the point.

"But it would be," persisted Dimmy, "if she went and got married. And Dr. Plaice is her beau. Flipper said so."

"Poh!" said big Jupiter, and walked off.

Earth and Venus looked at each other with a wide wonder in their eyes, and set their little white teeth suddenly very tight upon their under lips. It was a tremendous secret!

Venus came to first.

"Well, it must be pretty nice to have a beau," she said.

"Mr. Dimmy Comet!" said a voice behind them. The blind opened, and the doctor stood there.

"Allow me to beg the honor of a further acquaintance with so well-informed a gentleman. You will please to walk into my office here."

Dr. Plaice's hand was on Dimmy's shoulder.

"Oh, my gracious!" cried Earth and Venus simultaneously, and simultaneously rushed down a broad vista of space, that is, the village street, that turned between the tin-shop and the tailor's.

That light hand on Dimmy's shoulder was not to be mistaken. He walked in up the step as a little boy does walk in when his sins have found him out.

Dr. Plaice closed the door.

"Take a seat, Mr. Comet," he said politely. "The arm-chair, if you please."

If he had put him on a cricket, or let him stand, it would not have been half so bad. The arm-chair was high, formidable, and awfully suggestive. The tone of the "if you please" was unrelenting. The doctor might be going to pull all his teeth out; but he was without remedy.

Dimmy hitched up backwards into the great chair, putting his heel upon the forward rung, and hoisting himself by the arm. Seated there, his legs hung ridiculously short and small.

"The leading object of my life," said the terrible doctor, turning to the mantel, and taking up his meerschaum, "is enlightenment. You have enlightened me very much indeed within the last five minutes, Mr. Comet. I feel exceedingly obliged to you, — and to Flipper." And the doctor filled leisurely the bowl of his pipe, pressing the tobacco down evenly.

"Smoke, Mr. Comet? No, I thought not. Judging professionally, I should say that your constitution was not quite — up to it."

Dr. Plaice struck a match, held it to the pipe, and took a whiff or two, then drew a chair, and sat down himself.

This was awful! How long was it to go on? How long did it take the doctor to smoke his pipe? Would he keep him there all day mocking at him? Would he ever let him go? And what would Flipper say?

Dimmy twisted his short legs desperately, and untwisted them hazardously, and recklessly twisted them again. He squeezed the rim of his little soft felt hat into a great many doubles, to correspond with his legs; then he let it out, and squeezed it up again. He began to grow alarmingly red and swelled in the face, with mingled shame and fear and indignation.

"Your news was very interesting, Mr. Comet," resumed

the doctor ; " especially to myself. For that reason, and for another that I will mention presently, I should prefer that it should not be spoken of in like manner again. Do you understand ? "

For all answer, Dimmy struggled with his legs again, and obliterated his cap.

" The second reason is, that it does not happen to be true. If it were, I should be likely to tell of it myself. A gentleman, Mr. Comet, does not speak of other people's personal affairs until he is authorized ; and he never repeats things that he hears in a whisper, with a ' Don't tell ! ' neither, I think, does a lady. In the first place, ladies and gentlemen do not very often hear those things at all. "

Dimmy's redness grew ominous. He winked very hard. These were very grown-up words of the doctor's ; but instinct translated them. He learned a half-page of dictionary at least, in these five minutes, that he never forgot. He was very much ashamed, and he was very mad. His legs were in such a snarl with the chair by this time that it was hard to tell which was human and which was mahogany ; his face was big with tears that he would not cry, and his hat was pretty nearly hopeless.

At last, two words came forth, very much thickened and swollen themselves with their long restraint : —

" By George ! "

Dimmy lisped a little on his g's ; and the expletive sounded like something huge and soft, flung with great force, and hitting as hard as it could. Dr. Plaice laughed out ; he could not help it ; but then he immediately got up, and came over toward Dimmy, with his hand held out. He did not wish to humiliate and enrage him utterly. He meant to treat him really like a man at last.

" That is all, Dimmy. Now let's shake hands, and be friends. You don't like being talked to like a mean little

man? Well, you can wake up from that bad dream all safe at seven years old, with twice your age yet to grow in, and to make what kind of a man you will. Miss Caroline told you: if you want to be a 'splendid, honorable' one, don't do any small meddling things, or tell any small, meddling tales."

And Dr. Plaice kept hold of Dimmy's hand till his legs untwisted, and he was slid safely down out of the big chair. Then Dimmy put on his cap, pulled it very much over his eyes, and departed meekly and swiftly. When he was around the corner, however, behind the tin-shop, he paused, pushed his cap up into its place, took a good long breath, and said "By George!" again. But there were things in this "By George!" that had not been in the other. Out of it came a good deal in the boy's life that would not else have been there, and that we shall not follow him on to tell about.

The first resultant was his going with the walking-party that afternoon, in spite of the tingle with which he thought of it; which, if he had not been in a pretty fair sense a "by-George" character, one would hardly have expected him to do. He had two minds about it; but the spirit that swore by the king that was in him prevailed. He would n't sneak off, afraid. He would face the doctor and those girls. Besides, he would stop the tattle; that is, he thought he would. There was a good deal of the royal in this for seven years old.

Venus was in the middle of a knot of girls when Dimmy came upon the field. He watched and loitered until she emerged for a minute, and he caught her upon the edge. Then he sauntered by, close to her, his hands in his pockets.

"I say," he said low, over his shoulder, "don't tell of that, you know. 'T ain't true."

"My sakes!" cried little Venus, coming quite away, and going on with him; "I have told."

"Poh!" exclaimed Dimmy, in disgust. "Who?"

"Just Aurora, my best friend, you know."

Now Aurora was just the biggest little chatterbox in the whole school.

Poor Dimmy began to find out, to his dismay, how hard it is to catch up with a mistake. He thought of Jupiter, too, off in his bigger orbit, with the village fellows. What might not he say, in his big-boy fashion, worst of all, notwithstanding his "Poh"? The little Comet was very uncomfortable, and wished with all his heart that he had kept his tale to himself.

Aurora was nudging and whispering, walking behind the doctor and Miss Caroline, with her other best friend, a larger girl, Laura Frances. It was plain there was no knowing what might come of it. The whole solar system would have hold of it, and what a blaze and whirl that would be!

Dimmy marched up to Dr. Plaice, at his open office-door, when they were back again, and the girls had gone.

"I can't help it, after all," he said, without any antecedent to the "it." "I tried to stop it, and it won't."

"It isn't easy to stop a thing that is once started. There's a law of nature against it. But I'll see what I can do, Dimmy; and it is all right between you and me, anyway."

Dimmy's throat felt queer; and he came very near saying "By George!" again.

The sun was going down, and the air was just as sweet and tender as it had been all the day. Windows and doors stood wide, gathering in the rich feeling of June from the May air. Dr. Plaice came round through the hall again.

"Miss Caroline," he said, "the Golden Gate is open. Will you go down and see?"

The Golden Gate was the opening up the river where the west shone in, and filled up all the water aisle with a mist of glory. Far and deep between the trees that closed on either side lay the burning splendor whence the tide flowed down; and violet or crimson bars would lie across as the flame faded, or flecks and burnished lines of yet intenser fire be thrown up like isles and coasts along a dazzling sea, and all gathered, as it were, into one focus of light, for the wooded fringe and the high banks of the stream covered at right and left the stretch of the horizon, and left all heaven to be imagined from its single unclosed door.

So they went down to the river-side. The sloping bank shut out house and street and all the village sounds. Office and school-room, and all the ways by which their living and everybody's else went on, were behind them. Nothing was here but God's beautiful world that his souls are born into, and before them the Golden Gate lay open.

"It is like a beautiful secret," said Arthur Plaice.

"It is like the heaven inside and behind," said Caroline, softly.

"Yes; it is like that. It is that heaven is the great, beautiful secret. There is a piece of it, Caroline, that I have wished to tell you. Only the other side, there is still the dusty street."

Caroline stood utterly still.

"I am afraid I have no right; because" — his pause became a period. "I have earned just one hundred and fifty dollars all this last year beyond what absolutely had to keep me," he said, speaking it out quickly. "Your little school is better than that; and so I have no right to tell you beautiful secrets by the river-side, and then lead you out into the toil and dust."

"You mean that you have been *paid* just one hundred and fifty dollars," said Caroline, looking at him very proudly, and then turning away again; "and — I don't care for the dusty street."

"And you do care — ?" asked Arthur, eagerly, bending down to look after the shy face.

Caroline flushed up like the sunrise that tells God's morning story without any words.

Arthur Plaice felt the joy of his morning; but he was a man, and wanted speech, — just a word, ever so shy, ever so small. He forgot his own unfinished speaking.

"Translate," he whispered.

"I do care," said Caroline, quaintly and tremulously, "for the beautiful secret — which you did n't tell me."

And then the secret was told.

"I think they have gone *through* the Golden Gate," said Lydia, turning round from her organ, when she could no longer see her notes.

"I believe so too," said the mother, seeing them come up the old stone step at the end door; but she said it to herself.

She stepped out from the little dining-room where the tea was ready, — split-cake toast and a pink square of delicately broiled smoked salmon, — and met them in the dusk of the long, old hall.

"Will you come in?" she said to Dr. Plaice. "We are just ready."

"I will come if you will let me, — mother!"

He had got her hand fast with Caroline's in his own, as he said it.

"O you two children!" Mrs. Whapshare answered, when she had got over a little sob. "How long you have got to wait!"

"We can't help that," said Arthur. "It won't be any longer than it was before. And we should have waited. I suppose we have been waiting ever since we both were born."

Dr. Plaice took care to meet Dimmy Pickett the next morning.

"I've stopped it, Dimmy," said he, holding out his hand.

"How?" said Dimmy, explosively.

"As the Indians stop the fire from chasing them on the prairies, — kindled it at my own end. I want your congratulations, Dimmy. I am engaged to be married — some time — to Miss Caroline Whapshare."

Dimmy drew back his hand to pull his hat down over his eyes. He shuffled with one foot back and forth upon the ground. He was overwhelmed by this real, grown-up news, told him with his hand in his friend's just as if he had been big enough. He did not know what to do with it, or how to get away and leave it. All at once he pushed his hat back again, stood square upon his feet, and looked up.

"Are you making fun of me now, Dr. Plaice?"

"No, indeed. I am telling you my good news as my particular friend, whom I told yesterday that it was n't true. You'll wish me joy, won't you?"

"Yes," said Dimmy. "But if you want anybody else to know it now, I guess you'll have to tell 'em yourself. There's Miss Suprema coming."

And Dimmy vanished round the corner and into the school-room door.

Dr. Plaice stood still and laughed. "That's the brightest boy in Rintheroote," said he to himself.

Miss Suprema came up.

"Why, doctor, what is it? What have you done to Dimmy Pickett?"

"Told him some news, and got his advice. The advice, I think, was excellent; and I am sure my news was."

Then he told her the news; and she forgot to ask him anything about the advice.

When he went back into his office, he saw her, through the blinds, standing in one of her awful equilibriums. Whether she should keep on down the village street, taking her chances as she went, or turn about and go straight up to Mrs. Benny Dutell's, before she heard of it from anybody else? She could not expect to be first with everybody; she must be first with Mrs. Dutell. So the great whirl within her set her off in a right line at last, and she went up the street like a cyclone.

The doctor drew up his shoulders with a laughing shake, turned to his desk, and sat down.

Sat down to his desk and his books; and knew that he began, that moment, the days of a hard, uncertain waiting. The news was told; the fire had run; he had made a safe place to stand in; and now he must only — stand. That makes a long chapter; the Apostle Paul knew that, but it is not a chapter for a small story-book.

"It is all there can be about it for ever so long, Arthur," Caroline herself had said to him, in the first, blessed, sober, certain "talking-over."

"Mother could not do without me, and my little school, until Lydia is ready with her music, and John gets some sort of salary that will more than pay for his tickets in the cars and his lunches in the city. I must stay by home, you see. I should n't be worth taking away if I would n't."

For two years there was no new point reached in this, their story; none but the little shining points that count in "the kingdom;" in the inside beauty that lies away from the dusty street; that holds all the loveliest secrets, and the least of them sometimes the loveliest; and where

the Father that seeth in secret keeps his own inner blessedness hidden fast with the hearts of his children.

But in two years the outward may halt step with the inward till the hobble grows wearisome and painful.

In two years Dr. Plaice had put into the bank only four hundred dollars more. In two years Mrs. Whapshare's face had gathered new lines, and Caroline's had grown a little thin and pale with the constant pull of school.

Martha was two years crustier, and more like an old maid, while her service in the household was more comprehensive and invaluable than ever. Lydia and John were growing up to the realization of the hard tug of life, and the knowledge of the many wants and wishes that must go unmet.

Suprema Sharpe had had two years in which to find herself often at default for fresh aliment of news, and driven to turn and worry and recrunch the old: as a dog keeps a bone buried, and digs it up once in a while to try for a little more marrow in it.

Every now and then she dug up the Plaice-Whapshare bone; and every time she set it forth in sorrier fashion, and yet "bonier" light.

"The doctor was tired of his bargain; he had n't much the look of a satisfied man; if it was ever coming to anything, why did n't it come? The Whapshares held on well; she would say that for them."

Or, it was "a shame for Mrs. Whapshare to keep Caroline toiling on at her school for her. Why could n't she marry, and keep school to help herself? Car was growing old; she had got gray hairs on her temples. No doubt they were awful poor; everybody knew the place was mortgaged; and old Rufus Abell did n't lend his money just to get it back again. There was Lydia flourishing away on that organ. Much she'd ever make of it! She'd better have been running a sewing-machine."

In two years, Zerub Throop was dead, and nobody could find out, for a good while, what he had done with his money. By and by it came out that there was a will, and that Rufus Abell was executor. Of course; Rufus Abell executed everything.

Mrs. Whapshare took to having little nervous starts every time Rufus Abell came round the corner. She could not shake off the notion that news was coming to her yet, from old Zerub; from old Zerub — and the Lord; for she remembered always that about the king's heart; and she knew that in the inward light of things she had a right, and that the Lord and his angels live and work continually in the inward light, where man can neither see nor reach.

But Rufus went and came, and never stopped, or even looked up at the Whapshare windows. It was plain that he had no thought of any contingency for them.

All that was known about the will was, that it was an odd one; as it would not have been Zerub Throop's if it were not. That nothing was to be settled, — save certain legacies, the chief of which was to Sarah Hand, providing for her and for the cat, — for five years; only the property to be taken care of, rents and dividends collected, and all to wait that time, for any claim that might arise; failing which, it was then to be devoted to certain specified public uses.

Rintheroote was exercised to conjecture what that possible claim might be. A secret marriage, — a child, — half a dozen children, perhaps, adrift somewhere, liable to turn up?

Rufus Abell held his peace; indeed, he had nothing else to hold; the will registered, and open to any reading, only said just that: "For any claim upon said estate that may legally and within that time arise."

But Rufus Abell did call one day. The mortgage-debt was falling due, and the garden-lot would have to be sold.

This was how it was with the Whapshares at the time the queer thing happened which nobody will believe, and which Mrs. Eylett Bright will tell of in the next chapter.

IV.

HOW THE GHOST MANAGED. — MRS. EYLETT BRIGHT'S STORY.

My dear, I will tell you all about it. It was a haunted house. It was all explained by simple causes, — yes ; but it was a haunted house, nevertheless. It is a haunted world we live in, for that matter, Dora Dutton.

You see there are so many of us, — so many little Eylett Brights ; I like to call them by their whole patronymic, it suits them so well, Dutton, dear.

We all needed the country that summer. I was run down with change of servants, and nursing ; little Thode had just crept out of scarlet fever, with the tattered shreds of his dear little mortality about him, wanting all sorts of patching up ; and the other children had had it too, more or less ; mostly less, thank the good Providence ! We all needed the country, — doctor said we must have it ; but there was Eylett tied down to his desk, and the two thousand was n't any bigger for us this year than ever before.

The country is so wide and free ; and yet it is so hard to get a place in it, — a place for ever so many little Eylett Brights !

We wanted a large house, and we wanted it furnished ; there must be plenty of out-of-doors, and yet we did not want a "place" that would have to be kept up. People who were going to Europe, and had out-of-town residences

to leave, must leave them to their own sort, you know ; carriage and lawn and garden people, who would have gardeners and grooms. It was as much as ever we could do to have Onie and Ann. More ; for they were both going to leave. They had objections to the country. So we got Margaret and Ellen from the intelligence office, — the same article, you know, with a new label ; and there is n't much variety in the labels, either. It is wonderful how we have rung over the changes, — Margaret, and Katy, and Ann ; Bridget, and Ann, and Katy ; Bridget, and Margaret, and Ellen ; and how natural and of course the name sounds, whichever it is, when they tell it ; and how the impression of the whole successive multitude drifts and runs together in our minds into the image of one great, awful, representative — kitchen creature !

Well, we searched the papers, and we searched the country ; we had spent fifteen dollars before we knew it, running out and in to see things, and conclude they would n't do. So we kept quiet a while, and almost gave it up. Eylett said we might hit upon something by and by, when somebody's house was left on their hands, too late for a high rent or a whole season. I did n't see how, though. I told him it would have to come and hit upon us ; we could n't afford to go after it any more.

Things do come and hit you if you only stand still because you must, — not because you 're lazy.

One day, at the counting-room, Mr. Haughton was asking Eylett after his family. Eylett told him he was getting along ; but they needed a change, and it was not easy to make a plan that would suit in all ways.

"Take a house a little way out of town," said Mr. Haughton.

"I've been trying to," said Eylett, "but the house I want does n't seem to be anywhere."

One of the boys came in from the bank just then and heard it.

"I know of a house, Mr. Bright," he said; "but it's rather a queer one, up over the hill, out of our village; and to let cheap, I guess, — old Zerub Throop's. He's dead, and things are n't to be touched for five years. But the house can be hired just as it is, if anybody likes. It is a jolly big one, and an old garden and fields all round it. Why don't you come out and see it?"

Eylett guessed he would.

And so one day we went out to Rintheroots.

Why, you see it was splendid! All that great hill, and the sunrise on one side, and the sunset on the other! But, as to the house, it seemed as if the day had always had to climb over and round it, and had never shone through it. Such a musty, shady, lo-from-the-tombs old place you never got into! The front door was all grown up with weeds and vines. It was tall and narrow, with an old-fashioned fan-light over it. It looked as if nothing had ever gone in and out but coffins, I told Eylett.

We found a woman in the village who had kept house there; and she went up with us, and showed it.

"It's in good order," she said; "the front part's clean, because it ain't never been dirtied; and the back part's clean, because I done the scrubbin'."

There was one real lovely room across the ell, up-stairs, at the end. Four windows, — east, south, and west, — the sun and the soft wind just rioting through.

"O Eylett!" I cried, standing in the middle, "here's the summer-time and the beauty! Here's the life of the house!"

"Yes'm," said Mrs. Hand, "here's where 't was. But I'll tell you one thing: 'tain't more'n fair to let you know. I don't believe it's all gone out of it. *I don't believe, in my soul, Zerub's done with it!*"

She spoke in a hushed way, as if there might be some one listening.

"Done with it? He's dead!"

"Yes 'm; that's just why you can't tell. I stayed here a month afterwards, and I had — well, experiences. If I was you, I'd shet it up."

"Shut it up! I shall put the children into it."

"That may do. Maybe he'll quit, then."

I had my doubts about that conclusion, if I had n't about the ghost. I could n't think, if he wanted to come at all, that old Zerub, or any other rational spirit, would come back the less for, — you need n't laugh, Dutton; I don't care if they are mine!

"See here, my good woman!" says Eylett, turning round sharp, "I can't come here if my servants and children are to get hold of this nonsense. Has it been talked round in the village?"

"Not from me; I've held my tongue too long for Zerub to begin chattering now. I always left all his affairs to hisself, an' I do yit. But this is your affair, kinder, if you 're comin'. I jest eased my mind."

"It shall be the play-room, — the day-nursery," I repeated, ignoring the nonsense once and forever. "And here," said I, going back into a small adjoining chamber, "I'll have my sewing-machine and my writing-desk, and all my little things and doings that I want close by the children, but not mixed up and crowded with them. We can be grand here, Eylett. There is no end of room. As to those front parlors and bedrooms, we'll fasten back every blind, and fling up every window, and let June do the rest. We'll come, Eylett, won't we?" I concluded after my wife-fashion, — a decision first, and a question afterward.

So we went down into Rintheroote, and found Mr.

Rufus Abell, the agent ; and Eylett put in the ghost story in the way of business, and got off fifty dollars for that ; though I told him men always came out with the very thing they did n't want mentioned ; and we took the house for three hundred and fifty dollars, and could stay the season, — three months, or six, as we had a mind.

But we were not to ask to have the first thing done for us, and we were to alter nothing ourselves. These were the conditions.

We had a splendid time moving. You know I don't mind trouble ; and the children were as gay as larks. We did n't have much to move, either ; only our clothes, and the few things we could n't live without, and to send the rest right off to a store-room ; for we gave up our house in town, of course.

Margaret and Ellen gave warning the second morning after we got there ; that we expected. All we hoped for from them was to get through the flitting ; though how they could, with the sun shining as it did, and the clover smelling, and the birds singing, I don't see. I should as soon have given warning in heaven, — as, to be sure, I suppose some folks will !

Well, we did n't care. It was all fun ; nobody was going to call. I could just put on a calico wrapper, — keep it on, I mean, — and take right hold, if it came to that ; and we set Mrs. Hand to inquiring for us in the village. In result of which, after three days of the "warning," and three days more of the "week" that they would n't stay, and hardly ever will, and you hardly ever care to have them, since the days of warning are in themselves so like the days of doom ; and after yet three other days of expectation and hard work, and baker's bread, there came to "our ha' door," and when that was opened into the best — I mean the dingiest — parlor, a — well — these presents : —

A hat and feather, — that is, a very remarkable and exaggerated piece of a bird, that was neither wing, tail, nor breast, but enough of it for all three, attached mysteriously to the middle of a forehead; an emphatic chignon, a very much fluted and hitched-up alpaca overskirt, and a pair of tall-heeled boots, on which all the rest walked in.

What else should have come, unless, indeed, it had happened to be a man? These, you know, are the things which stand for a woman nowadays, and make up the general presentment and expression of her, confounding distinctions; so that the pieces of a woman in the windows of the great furnishing shops, "articulated" on wires, hint out something rather superior, on the whole, to most of the specimens which articulate themselves, and are seen about the streets.

The "articulation," in this instance, announced herself to me, looking at her with a puzzle and a question in my face, as "a girl." An American girl she was, too; no Irish, we found out gradually, would apply. Although Sarah Hand had been reticent, Terence Muldoon — who chored, and chopped wood, and "fought and carried" for old Mr. Zerubbabel Throop, and who stayed by to "garrud the hoose," with Mrs. Hand, during the month of her closing-up services and administration — had not been so; and there were vague and terrible rumors afloat in the Irish stratum of society, and the universal Irish mind was set against the "owld Throop place an' its divilments." This came to us by degrees, as our own experience developed.

"I'm the girl," said the articulation, "that Mis' Hand was to look up. She's my Aunt Sarah. I'm a dasher."

"You're a — what?" said I, explosively, in my astonishment.

"A dasher: — a dasher down."

I just stared. I began to think she must be a lunatic. And a lunatic who announced herself as a dasher down might not be the subject of a form of hallucination one would like to have illustrated in one's parlor.

But while I stared, she added mildly, "That's my name."

"Oh!" said I, relieved, and catching my breath. "Just spell it, if you please."

"A,d,a,s,h,a — Adasha; D,o,w,n,e — Downe; Adasha Downe."

"Thank you. It sounds rather terrific, you see, before one knows, especially for a person who is to handle cups and saucers."

Adasha gave a bright look out of her eyes without moving a muscle of her very round, and very large, and very solid face.

"There's many a one gets a name, you know, for a thing they never did." Then she smiled widely. She could not help it; she must do it widely, if she smiled at all. It took very little exertion, and but slight play of her lips; for her lips were ample, and behind them were white teeth that needed generous accommodation.

I liked the smile and the bright look. I began to think of engaging her; up to that moment I had only thought how to get rid of her. I asked her if she could make bread and hop-yeast; if she could wash and iron; and if she would do anything else that I might ask of her, and tell her how.

She could and she would.

"Will you take off your things and stay now?"

"Well, ma'am, you see, in my suit and my heeled boots and my hair, I don't really see how I could. But I'll get a bag o' clo'es, and come back in half an hour."

"Very well."

She did. And so we had Adasha Downe.

That was all we had ; and we found it was all we had to hope for. For love, nor money, nor for Christian charity, we could get no soul to offer or consent. We tried for three weeks ; and then we settled down, until the prejudice should wear away, to a plan that we fitted to the case. A boy to do chores, and a woman to come three times a week, and wash and iron and scrub. Then, with all the children, and their summer liberty, on my hands, I thought of another expediency, — a young girl as a sort of governess-companion, who might keep them up in their A-B-C, and their tables, tell them which side of the world they were on, and a few preliminary items of like importance ; sew on a string or a button now and then, and help me in such things as I daily put my practical hands to.

We found her ; she was foreordained.

Do you remember little Car Whapshare, the youngest girl at dear old Cradley School the last year we were there ? She lives right here in Rintheroote ; and she had kept school until she had n't much face left ; though what she had still kept the pretty in it, as the child's barley-sugar keeps the clear and the sweet down to the last thin needle of identity. She was engaged to marry — in this life or in the life everlasting — a splendid fellow, the young doctor of the place. But the old doctor would n't let go, and the old patients would n't change ; and so he was getting — excellent practice and very limited pay ; and Car's mother was poor. And that's the way things were with them ; and they could n't be much more wayward.

Arthur Plaice — her doctor — said she must give up teaching, for all summer at least. She was in a worry. But then, there was I in a worry too, up there on the hill ; and the worries of the world do, once in a while,

when the right ones are thrown together, turn suddenly, by the beautiful chemistry of things, into a blessed mutual content.

Car Whapshare came to live with us all summer.

And it was just after she came, mind you, that the signs and wonders began.

How we three — Car, Adasha, and I — did work, letting the besieging pleasantness into that old house! Adasha, cleared for action, without her heeled boots and her hair, — that is, with only a reasonable amount that you might believe in, gathered up with a screw and a double behind, and fastened with a rubber-comb, — without any humps or hitchups, — turned suddenly into an individual. That was a refreshment and a confidence. I suppose there is a beauty of “the all,” — Emerson says so; but you do want eaches; the world will never make up the nicest kind of total by rubbing out its units.

We could not alter; but we could innovate and renovate. We rolled back the heavy worsted damask curtains on their old-fashioned gilded poles, threw wide the blinds, and let the summer in. We turned the musty old chairs and sofas out on the grass; we cut away the thorn-branches, and the twisted stems of creepers, from the choked-up porch; and we left the high, narrow door open all day long, so that a column of sunshine poured itself through that way in the morning, and bars of gold shot slanting across from the windows of the south parlor through the noontime. When the house was sweetened full of it, we began to shut the green blinds again in the mid-day, and only leave the air to filter in from over sun-basked fields and tops of clover.

“We’ll drive the ghosts out,” I said, gayly.

“They’ll be driv’ out or stirred up,” said Adasha Downe. “I don’t s’pose we can tell which till we’ve tried.”

Mrs. Hand came up several times to see us. Partly because of her niece ; partly because of the cat, which was her charge, but which she could not coax away with her ; and partly to ask me privately every time, and with solemn emphasis, just before she went away, "if we had noticed anything."

"Nothing," I told her at last, "but that black cat. She haunts the house. There's something awful about her. She steals round everywhere, like an uneasy spirit ; but she won't come in and be tame. I have met her in the rooms and on the stairs ; but the minute she sees anybody, she's off like a black rocket, with her tail straight up in the air, and as big ! The children have found a kitten ; they pet that, and the old cat stands away off and watches. She is like a human mother that lets her child be taken in where she does n't feel willing or worthy to go. She behaves like a bad conscience."

"Zerub Throop had n't a bad conscience. He war n't givin', nor he war n't pious ; but he was a real righteous pertickeller man."

"I never thought of Mr. Throop, Mrs. Hand. I was speaking of the cat."

"All the same. She's in it. She knows," said Mrs. Hand, impressively.

"Cats are signful creaturs, about weather, an' sickness, an' sech ; an' they have a feelin' for other-world things, too, you may depend they do. They see in the dark. What does that mean ? It jest corresponds. Do you know how hard it is to keep a cat out of a dyin' room, or where a corpse is ? You jest wait and notice."

"Oh, for mercy's sake, don't !" I cried out, almost with a shriek.

The woman was growing ghastly.

"La ! I did n't mean anything. Like as not you'll

never have a chance. But that's a fact. It's the reason why they stay round places so. Everything is n't gone, and they know it. Why, live folks leaves something of theirselves in the places where they've been and acted. Now, whenever I heerd them noises, that cat was alwers yowlin' alongside, — way off, maybe, or even afterwards; but she always jined in — or Amcnned."

"Mrs. Hand, what were the noises?"

"I don't know. Kind of stirrins, — soundins; everywhere to once, distant and down-like, but strugglin' an' risin' up. I can't tell you what they were; but the old house seemed all breathin' alive with 'em, as if they might bust out anywheres. I'll tell you what I think. If ever you hear anything, you'll hear more. It seemed to me as if 't was only a kind of gettin' ready, a-gropin' out. You wait and notice."

"If only you would n't please say that!" cried I, nervously. The words were growing awful to me. And then I laughed at myself for minding them, or any of it, as I bade Mrs. Hand good-morning at that pleasant east side-door, opening out into the warm, living breath and glory of the perfect June day.

Well, the children had their games all day long; their blocks and their baby-house, their tea-parties and their soap-bubbles, in the bright ell-chamber; and they played horse, driving each other with gay, knitted harness and reins, up and down the long passages of the old house; and they went to bed at night in the west rooms, back of ours, where the twilight lingered till they were fast asleep; and I said to myself, "They take up all the time, and they fill the house full; what else — if there were anything — could creep in? Their little plays, and their little prayers, and their little dreams, and their sweet sleeping breath, — why, it's a *home* now, brimming over with

them. Bad vapors could n't come up through the fair, full fountain."

And so, after the happy, tired day, I went to sleep myself, and slept as having angels about me.

There was one thing we had to do to that ell-chamber. We had to take the door down. It was a modern door, put up since Mr. Throop came ; and it lifted off its hinges. The reason we could not have it on was, that it shut with a horrid spring-lock. We could n't have the children getting shut in there every day, and having to be taken down outside, you know, with ladders.

Eylett and I had the northwest front bedroom. There were two large rooms, and a little one tucked in between, on each side the hall in the main house ; then the long ell ran back, and there were three or four in that, besides the attics. Caroline Whapshare slept in the large one back, on the southeast side, and the children, as I said, were in the rooms behind ours. Nobody slept in the ell. Adasha Downe had the little room next to Miss Whapshare's.

Somehow, in the great rambling place, we did like to keep all together at night. There would be thunder-showers, and there might be burglars ; nobody believed in anything else or farther off. The children never heard a word. I found I could really trust Adasha Downe.

Whether it was the fatigue that gave us such sound nights, or whether there never was anything to wake us up until the night I am going to tell of, I don't know ; but so it was, that, for a week or two after my talk with Sarah Hand, we might have been the builders and first dwellers at Throop Hill, for all sign we had from the "soul of things" in its old timbers or out from its far corners.

Then, all at once, something happened.

I had gone to bed one evening at ten, and had had my first two hours' nap. Suddenly I sat up, wide awake.

Something crashed me awake ; a great resounding came with me out of my dream ; and I listened mentally in as great an outward silence, to hear what it had been like.

A ringing, clattering, metallic sound, as if a tin-man's cart had been upset outside, or a great sheet of thin iron been shaken or struck upon somewhere in the house.

Had I heard it ? or was it only that all my nerves had suddenly vibrated with some tingling shock, and waked me with a feeling of such sound ? It was "all over everywhere," as Mrs. Hand had expressed it ; either all over me, or — creation perhaps.

Why did not everybody in the house wake up ?

While I held my breath and wondered, it came again. Now I knew that I heard it with my bodily ears. But what I heard, I could neither conceive nor tell.

"My gracious, Eylett ! what was that noise ?"

I had my hand tight upon my husband's shoulder. But Eylett was lying on his right side ; and he could not hear with his left ear.

"Noise ? I don't hear any. Let me move. Let me get my good ear up. What was it like ?"

"I don't know. Like a ringing, or scraping, — a rattling, a reverberating, — crashing, and hollow, far off and all round. In the air. As if the house was a Chinese gong, and somebody was trampling in the middle of it."

"All that ? Pooh ! You've been dreaming."

"No, I have n't. I've been sitting straight up with my eyes open."

We both sat straight up for ten minutes, and in those ten minutes everything was deadly still. At the end of them, we heard a cat's dolorous cry, away off, down below, somewhere.

"How can that cat have got in ?"

"She is n't in ; she 's under the piazza, probably. She

does go there. You 'd better go to sleep, Lizzie." And Eylett laid himself down again, as men do when there is n't a fire nor anybody to shoot.

I knew I had better go to sleep ; but I did n't for two good hours. By that time, I could hardly have declared that I had heard anything, it was so long ago, and I had so studied my impression to pieces, trying to match it to any possibility of causation.

Of course, Eylett laughed at me in the morning ; and of course, I let him laugh, and did n't say anything till he got through. Women never do. Only when I thought he had had it out reasonably, I hushed him up as regarded the rest of the family. " Don't talk about it downstairs," I said.

He thought I wanted to be let alone on my own account. It was not that. I wanted the fact let alone. If it was not a noise, it was an experience. That was what Mrs. Hand had called it. If you have the experience, what difference does the noise, or whatever else it may be, make, one way or the other ?

The next night I went to bed in a perfectly calm and equable state of mind. I can positively affirm that I expected nothing except to sleep. And I did sleep, as I always do, instantly and soundly, after my little read, which I always indulge in at night, with a candle on my small book-table beside my bed, in defiance of all old-time superstitions handed down from the days of voluminous bed-curtains and top-hamper, and absurdly repeated now, when we lie down on our flat mattresses in their low French boxes, with nothing combustible within a yard of the light.

I slept my three or four early hours. I am glad they are the hours of " beauty-sleep ;" for they are the only hours I am perfectly sure of. After that, I begin to nap

and dream, to wake, and think of things, — the beans I meant to have told Adasha to put to soak, the jam that must be scalded over, the twist and buttons to be got for the tailoress who is coming Thursday ; then, being thoroughly roused, to go round and regulate open windows, and cover up the children.

It was, perhaps, about two o'clock when I was again electrified into full and instant consciousness. The same reverberating, radiating noise, ringing, rattling, metallic, with a queer sound of struggle in it, too, that suggested Pandemonium as one great tin kettle, and all the little imps clawing frantically to get out.

Then there came a bang. That woke Eylett. Neither of us said a word, but both were instantly out of bed and into dressing-gown and slippers.

We went into the great upper hall, and stood still. Everything else stood still, too. We could hear the old Willard clock ticking away composedly down in the dining-room, and not a breath or movement of anything else.

We went on, down between the rooms ; as we went, there came winding up from somewhere, the eerie, weary, wandering wail of that uncanny cat.

Two doors moved their open cracks a little as we passed, and two noses were put forth.

"Marm ! Sir !" cried Adasha Downe, in a tremulous whisper, "what was that racket ?"

"What can have happened ?" said Car Whapshare.

"Don't wake the children," whispered I. "We are going to see."

We went everywhere ; up and down all the stairs, into the kitchen and pantries and out-rooms. We opened the side-door and looked out into the starlight. Something black dashed out between Eylett's legs.

"I told you that cat was in," said I.

"Well, she's out," replied Eylett. "She could n't have done it."

We found nothing to account for the clatter, not even a dipper or tin pan fallen down.

We went up-stairs again, and encountered the noses waiting.

"What was it?" came the two whispers again.

"It does n't seem to have been anything," answered Eylett.

"Marm!" said Adasha Downe, breathlessly, "that's awful!"

"No, it is n't," I retorted, with decision. "It's quite comfortable. Don't frighten the children."

In the morning I was dressed early, and went through the rooms up-stairs with a vague feeling as if I might see by daylight where the sound had been.

There was a tin horse on the entry floor, lying peaceably upon its side, with that touchingly helpless and resigned expression that children's dolls and horses have in the cast-off positions in which little hands have left them; there was the usual litter of blocks and toys in the play-room, but nothing seemed as though it had borne part in any mystical orgie. The summer sun streamed in, and filled the chambers to the brim with cheer and splendor.

Coming out of the ell-room, I noticed the register-valve slipped slightly out of its place, and resting with one edge just over upon the floor. I pushed it back, and wondered who had moved it. I supposed Adasha must have lifted it out, in sweeping, to brush the dust from the spreading mouth of the pipe. I mentioned it to her when I went down-stairs, and asked her to be careful. It would not do for the children to get an idea of its coming off. Adasha told me she had not "tetched" it. She did n't know it

would come off. It was queer ; but I supposed it "happened" somehow, and then I forgot all about it.

We had two still nights, and then in the third a rattle and a slam woke me up. I missed the reverberation, if it had occurred. In fact, I did not connect this with the other. It sounded like some one fumbling at a blind or lock, and then a sudden jar, as of blind or door flung back.

"It's burglars this time!" I whispered loudly in Eylett's ear. "I heard them trying something, and then it banged."

"Burglars don't bang," said Eylett, sleepily.

"There is n't any wind, and things don't bang themselves," said I. "You'd better get up."

So we had another promenade. It came to nothing, like the rest.

"Are we never to get any sleep in this house?" asked Eylett, in a melancholy way. "Don't hear anything more, Lizzie, if you can help it."

"No, I won't," I replied, dutifully, keeping the rest of my thoughts to myself.

In the morning, before I went down the back stairs to the kitchen to look after breakfast, stopping at the play-room, as I had a habit of doing, drawn by the pleasantness of the place, where the children had been yesterday and were going to be to-day, and taking a glance at the sunshine and the toys that seemed conspiring a good time together, I saw that register off again, — really off, this time, an inch or two.

Could it have been that which banged in the night! I went back and called Eylett.

"Just look!" said I. "How do you suppose it came so?"

"Children," said he.

"No," I affirmed positively. "I found it so before; and

I have watched. They never meddle with it; and, besides, it was not so at bedtime. We undressed them here. Do you suppose I should n't have noticed it?"

"Spirits, then," suggested Eylett, meekly, as driven to a logical end. "It's their style. Like their impudence."

"Pshaw!" said I, which was precisely what he wanted me to say.

For all that, the same night there was a greater din and rampage than ever; and the next morning there was the register fairly off and away, wheeled completely from the hole, and laid with nearly its entire circumference upon the carpet.

I called them all then, — Eylett, Caroline, and Adasha Downe. It was early. The children were only just waking up, and beginning to throw the pillows at each other, or to pull on stockings heel-side before.

"That ghost comes up the register-pipe," said Adasha Downe, solemnly, looking into the hole as into the mouth of the pit.

"And the ghost is" — cried I, with a sudden illumination.

"Never in this world!" broke in Eylett, catching my idea, and putting the extinguisher on before I had fairly shown its little blaze. "Just lift that register," said he.

I put my hands under the two valves, an iron and a brass one. I suppose they weighed six or seven pounds. Could indeed a — well, the object of my suspicion — lift them up?

"I don't care," said I. "We'll see. I'll sit up this very night."

On the whole, however, when bedtime came, I decided to take that first nap, and trust to the usual reveille for warning. If I was right in my convictions, it would give me time enough. I am a light sleeper. I always hear the first stir.

I put a light in one of the ell-rooms, and set the door open upon the passage. I left another burning in my little sewing-room, back in its farther corner, and shaded so that it shone faintly out through the play-room.

A cross passage led over from opposite the head of the back staircase, between the rooms, to a linen-closet. Standing in this opening, or just down the first step of the staircase, one could command the whole scene of action, and nothing could pass in or out without observation.

I laid my dressing-gown and slippers in instant readiness. In fact, everybody else did the same; and we all slept, so to say, upon our arms; for everybody had petitioned, "Call me, if you hear anything."

Somehow, we were a little later that evening than usual; so that, with my ordinary and extraordinary preparations for the night, it was eleven o'clock, and the others were all asleep, when I was about to put out my own candle. Just as I had my hand upon the extinguisher, it began — the noise.

That frantic, struggling, scratching, ringing, infernal sound, coming away up from depths below, and echoing everywhere.

"Quick! there it is already!" I cried to Eylett, and in the same moment was off myself. I darted in at the two doors on my way, and wakened the girls with one shake each. "Don't be ten seconds, or else don't come!" I said, and hurried on. And in less than a minute we were all upon the spot, huddled, listening, lying in wait, in staircase and entry.

There was no doubt, standing there, where the sound came from. Up that long pipe from two floors below, it tore and grappled, grated and resounded; came on, with pauses, higher and higher; at last was on a level with ourselves. Then a fierce stirring and grinding, a seizing of

hold and purchase. And then the valves clattered, as if pushed against, ineffectually, once or twice; then, with a great hoist, they raised, swiveled, clashing round, and fell with an awful bang upon the floor.

That demoniac cat walked forth.

It was a positive fact. We saw it with our eyes. If anything in this story — my part or anybody's else — is embellished, it is not that.

"I told you so!" said I to Eylett.

And Eylett could not say a word.

We were all down cellar next morning, after our early breakfast, investigating; and the more we investigated, the more we wondered.

Out of the brick dome of the furnace, high up, came the tin pipe that ran horizontally one third or more the length of the house, then up, twelve feet perhaps, through the lower story and the two floors.

We opened the iron door of the air-chamber from which the pipes radiated, and looked in. There was only this one that started laterally; all the rest sprung from the top. The furnace itself was built close against a brick partition which divided the cellar. A heavy padlocked door shut off the forward part, which had been Mr. Throop's wine-cellar, and where all remained as he had left it. Through some opening in the back, accessible only from this locked division, must come the supply of air to feed the furnace-chamber, and circulate in the pipes. Through this, also, by ways known only to herself, must have crept the cat, and likewise circulated.

Into that dark, hollow space, up its rough-cast sides,— into the small, utterly obscure aperture, along those twenty feet of mystery and uncertainty, — one would think this was exploit and marvel enough; but up that twelve feet perpendicular, with nothing but the lapping of the tin

sheets to claw by, and the bracing of her body between the narrow sides! Beyond that, the closed register at the top! What sort of faith, or instinct, or impishness, was it that led her on? We stood in utter, awed bewilderment. It was almost stranger than a ghost.

One thing was certain: we could not let the play have a run of a hundred nights. Something must be stopped up, or come down.

"The hole in the furnace," suggested Caroline.

"We can't get at it."

"Nail something over the register."

"Then we should have the noise all the same, and the poor cat would have to tumble twelve feet, and crawl twenty backward. She deserves better for her smartness."

"Unhitch the pipe."

"We can't have workmen into the house, or alter anything."

"I'll do it myself," said Adasha Downe. And she straightway ran up the cellar staircase, beside which passed the pipe, and laid brave hold.

A neck of iron was set in the brick-work of the furnace, around which fitted the tin sheet. Adasha pulled and pulled; but what could she do with twenty or thirty feet of metal cylinder, and years of rust? Eylett stood still considering, while she strove unheeded. Then he went and got a hammer and a chisel. Then I climbed up on a barrel, on the other side of the pipe to where Adasha was. Caroline took the children up the staircase, and kept them there peering down at us in a little eager heap from its head.

Eylett hammered and loosened, and we pulled. We all pulled. Eylett twisted; and presently, all of a sudden, some weak joint gave way above, and, at the same moment, the neck yielded, and — crash! down came the whole thing, revenging itself upon us by its compliance.

"Oh, mamma! mamma!" cried out Robbie; for I and my barrel had tumbled down. Adasha seated herself very hard upon the stairs.

"Are you hurt, Lizzie?" cried Eylett, coming in a hurry.

No. Nobody was hurt. Only the pipe was separated in two or three places, the air was full of dust, and we felt as if we had pulled half the house down.

"Phew! phew!" said Eylett; and brushed his hands against each other, and looked at the wreck.

He lifted a long piece, and set it up on end against the wall. Out of it, as he did so, fell a great deal more dust, and other things which we perceived as the dust subsided. A great many pins—of course; an old piece of black comb; a red chessman; nutshells; a brass thimble; hair-pins; corks; a handful of coppers that probably used to roll out of Zerub Throop's trousers-pockets when he pulled them off; in the midst of the heap, something round and bright, like a silver ball.

The children—little wreckers that they always are—were down again by this time, notwithstanding remonstrances. They could n't help it; they kept minding, and going up, and irresistibly gravitating down again, in little sprinkles, one and two at a time.

Robbie pounced upon the shining thing.

"Oh, I speak for that! Is it a silver dollar, mamma?"

Poor Robbie had heard traditions of silver dollars, earned and saved up in his father's childhood; but his little experimental knowledge stretched not beyond the days of scrip.

"Oh, no!" I said, foolishly. "That is n't a dollar. It is n't anything."

"Not anything, mamma? Why—why—here it is!"

"I'll tell you what it is," said Blossom, standing daintily

on the stairs out of the dust, with her fresh piqué frock, and her little white stockings. "It's a fairy ball, and Miss Whapshare will tell us a story about it."

"So I will," said Car, seizing her opportunity. And she got them all away, up out of the cellar.

What she told them I don't know, — about fairy balls that opened, and had wonders inside; and fairy balls that only rolled and rolled and rolled, and led people along through forests and among mountains, and out into some paradise perhaps, of elf-land, at last. But when I had changed my dusty dress, and washed my face and hands, and seen Eylett brushed up and off to the train, I found them all together in the play-room; Car, with the ball in her hand, and Robbie and Blossom beseeching her to open it.

"Then it will be spoiled," she said, "if it isn't an opening ball. I think it is a rolling one. It must have rolled down the register. Who knows where it will roll next?"

Behind me up the stairs, in a fashion of privilege she had taken, came suddenly Sarah Hand.

And, of course, then came the story, — all about the cat, and the pipe, and the ball.

"You see a great tin piece of the house came down when they pulled," said Robbie, "and broke; and everything came out, — cents and pencils and everything."

"Droppins and sweepins," said Sarah Hand. "That's how they came there."

"Not my fairy ball," said Robbie. "That rolled itself. Nobody knows where it rolled from. Way down and down, and over and over, and all through the world."

"I'll tell you where it rolled from," said Sarah Hand, taking it up. "I remember it. It's one of the things that used to lay round on Zerub Throop's table. I know

em all by heart; the things I used to turn over and dust, and put back careful. I noticed that, because it looked as if there might be something did up in it. He fixed it his own self one day after dinner. I recollect the day too. 'Cause Mis' Wh—— he 'd had a visitor, and we 'd had a talk. I s'pose he was jest settin' thinkin'. It's kinder awful, comin' across things so, after folks is dead and gone."

And Mrs. Hand laid back the ball on Caroline Whapshare's lap.

Caroline took it up as if by a sudden impulse, and picked out one edge of the folded foil. A little tremor passed over her.

"What is the matter?" said I.

"Nothing. I shivered, I don't know why."

"H-m-m!" said Mrs. Hand, and looked solemn.

"I think that might as well be unrolled, and done with, now the story is told," I said briskly; for the children's eyes were getting big. "We shall be having little nightmares of the ball traveling about, if we don't take care."

Then Caroline turned back corner after corner, edge after edge, until two ends were opened out. It was no longer a ball, but a little roll. There was something in it.

Paper, — written paper, folded and coiled.

"I feel as if it were a secret," said Caroline, as the last doubling of tin-foil fell away, and left it in her hand.

"Perhaps it is. But there is nothing hidden" — I stopped. Car had got the paper open, had given one glance at it, and every bit of color had flashed instantly out of her face.

"Mrs. Bright! What does it mean?"

And poor little Caroline burst out crying. That saved her from fainting away.

I took the creased and curled-up scrap.

For value received of Miles Whapshare, in the year one thousand eight hundred and forty-five, I promise and direct to be paid to Mrs. Miles Whapshare, widow of said Miles Whapshare, or her heirs-at-law, six months after my decease, or on the presentation of this paper to my executors at any time within five years from such decease, Thirty-five thousand dollars.

ZERUBBABEL TROOP.

I turned it over.

"October 19th, 1866.

"Left to Providence.

"Payable to order ; that is, on turning up."

We sent for Rufus Abell and for Dr. Plaiice.

It was all quite plain and strong ; as strong as it was queer.

"This is the thing that was provided for," said Rufus Abell, just as unmoved as if he could possibly have expected it. I suppose Mr. Abell had got over surprises long ago.

Arthur and Caroline went home together to tell Mrs. Whapshare.

I watched them go down the hill in the sunshine, gathering it, as it were, around and after them, to carry down in one great golden rush into the corner house that had been full of little crowding clouds of care so long. I thought of that bit of creased-up paper in Rufus Abell's wallet, and how it would go to probate with the will, and settle everything, and how strange, and changed, and wonderful it all was. And I bit my tongue to try if I was awake ; and then I turned round and said to Mrs. Hand : —

"To think it should all be by means of that cat!"

"It's very well," said Mrs. Hand, with slow significance, "to lay it all off on to her. But what possessed the *cat*? It's like the pigs in the New Testament. If — a ghost — wanted something — out of a register-pipe, — he might — very likely — need some sort — of a cat's-paw to help hisself with."

Was it a cat, or was it a ghost, or was it simply Providence? It was the question left on our minds. We thought, humbly and honestly, that it might be all three. We put this and that together that we had learned, and we believed it just possible, among the mysteries, that Zerub Throop had at last "come across Providence," and had been set to work perhaps with such links and agencies on earth as he had established for himself.

At any rate, the Ghost Story and the Cat Story got so mixed up and merged that they were never popularly disentangled.

We could never get any other girl than Adasha Downe to live with us at Throop Hill, though we came there three summers.

"The owld man might ha' left somethin' else that needed seein' afther; who knows?" the Irish said.

Caroline Whapshare and Arthur Plaice were married in September. Mrs. Whapshare gave them five thousand dollars.

"There would be that," she said, "for each of the children, and the same for her own part. They should have their share as they came to want it. She'd done waiting enough herself for the whole family."

Miss Suprema Sharpe had a kind of congestive fever that fall. She took cold at the wedding. But the doctor did not think that was quite the whole of it. There was

a feverish fullness that must determine somewhere, — a greater pressure than the ordinary circulation could carry off.

A ghost-story, a fortune, and a wedding, — what they did with the money, and how they behaved about it, — all this, you see, to come right in here, like an avalanche, at the corner, to be thoroughly sifted and discussed, and realized and criticised. Well, it could not have gone much harder with Suprema Sharpe; and if you knew her as we do, Dutton, you would understand.

It is n't a matter to make fun of, though, and I would n't have you think I do. It's an awful fact, and a solemn retribution. There is such a thing as a vacuum in heart, or brain, or life, by which the surrounding atmosphere has to press in with fifteen uncompensated pounds to the inch. And that is the way the burden of everybody's else affairs comes down at last upon the Sharpes.

That could n't have been in Dante; could it, Dutton dear?

But if Dante had come after Kepler and Newton — and a few other folks — I guess it would have been.

